THE ® saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

SEPT. 35c

ICD

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Mr. Smith Kicks the Bucket
by FREDRIC BROWN

The Headless Mummies
by SAX ROHMER

Ghosts Make No Noise
by RICHARD SALE

The Vandyck Beard
by LOUIS GOLDING

Adventure of the Little Hangman
by AUGUST DERLETH

THE GOOD MEDICINE
A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A [illegible] PUBLICATION

AMONG the hottest contenders for my projected "Willie" Award for the Tiredest Clichés (so named in honor of a certain Mr. Shakespeare, who is responsible for creating more of them than almost anyone) would, I think, be the clonker about *"What's in a name?"* A rose by any other name might smell as sweet, as the oracle said, but if you had to call it a grogstench it would certainly not be mentioned in so many poems. I am not going to parade my inside knowledge of the baptismal monikers of some of our most euphoniously named movie stars, of which everyone can probably recall a few samples, but I will simply ask what chance Mr. and Mrs. Fiddlebottom, who christened their handsome son Ferdegrave after a rich uncle, would have of seeing his name on a marquee, no matter what his talent. And only yesterday I encountered in a newspaper an innocent item about a lady whose name, it mentioned dispassionately, was Crap. I don't know if she ever had an ambition to sell magazine stories or movie scripts under that name; but if she had, she would have been bucking a strong tide.

Through our pages, of course, pass the most beautiful names in the world.

In this issue, for instance, Sax Rohmer—surely one of the most perfect names ever coined for its type of job—has another of those weird stories, THE HEADLESS MUMMIES, about his off-beat criminologist Moris Klaw, an odd name indeed. While Fredric Brown, a good sturdy everyday name, aptly writes of an outwardly colorless Henry Smith in MR. SMITH KICKS THE BUCKET.

Richard Sale, who must be frequently infuriated by wags who want to call him Chic, is here with another adventure of his felicitously named Daffy Dill, while August Derleth adds another brand-new chapter to his memoirs of the singularly labeled Solar Pons.

Some authors work so hard that they have to use several names, like Aaron Marc Stein, who has chosen to hang his real and perhaps least-known one on BATTLE OF WITS. Louis Golding, so far as I know, uses no alias, and even if he wanted to I don't think THE VANDYCK BEARD could disguise his rare quality of scrupulously literate writing. The author of THE GOOD MEDICINE also refuses to write under any other name, but that is because he is just plain lazy.

HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO GET YOUR COPY OF THE saint EACH MONTH?

THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE gives you the most thrilling collection of mystery-detective fiction ever made available in a SINGLE MAGAZINE.

In each issue of THE SAINT, you meet internationally famous writers whose published novels would cost you from $2.75 to $3.95 each.

You can look forward to a COMPLETE MYSTERY each month by LESLIE CHARTERIS—creator of THE SAINT, one of the most popular characters in fiction today—PLUS exciting stories by outstanding authors, such as, John Dickson Carr, Agatha Christie, Sax Rohmer, Van Wyck Mason, Craig Rice, Philip Wylie, Octavus Roy Cohen and many others.

We should like very much to add your name to the list of the many thousands of mystery-loving subscribers from New York to Sydney, from Paris to the ports of Mars who in recent years have become THE SAINT'S avowed partisans.

If you are having trouble finding THE SAINT on your newsstand, and you want to be sure of getting us regularly . . . just clip the coupon below and mail it to us—with your check or money order—and THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE will arrive on time each month.

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
320 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, New York

Kindly enter my subscription for THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE
One year (12 issues) at $3.75 Two years (24 issues) at $7.00
Additional postage: Canada 50¢, Foreign $1.00.
Please remit by check or money order.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY, ZONE, STATE_____

PLEASE PRINT SD 79

THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

SEPTEMBER, 1957
VOL. 8, NO. 3

The Good Medicine 4
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

Battle of Wits 29
by AARON MARC STEIN

Adventure of the Little Hangman . . . 46
by AUGUST DERLETH

The Vandyck Beard 63
by LOUIS GOLDING

He Came Back 71
by RICHARD HARDWICK

Ghosts Don't Make Noise 77
by RICHARD SALE

Mr. Smith Kicks the Bucket 93
by FREDRIC BROWN

The Saint's Ratings 102
A NEW FEATURE

The Headless Mummies 103
by SAX ROHMER

Morbid Egotist 120
by JONAS CARTER

First Job 125
by CHARLES E. FRITCH

H. L. Herbert
Publisher

Hans Stefan Santesson
Editorial Director

Leslie Charteris
Supervising Editor

THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, Vol. 8, No. 3. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 320 Fifth Ave., N. Y. 1, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y.
Characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. © 1957, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved, September, 1957.
PRINTED IN U. S. A.

GABRIEL HEATTER reports on dramatic new invention that triumphs over hearing loss and hides deafness as never before

New Way for Deaf to Hear with Both Ears ...Eye-Glass Hearing

by Gabriel Heatter — Internationally Famous Commentator heard nightly over MBS network

A HISTORY MAKING INVENTION at last enables the deaf to hear clearly again with both ears—as nature intended.

This dramatic advance, perfected by Beltone electronic scientists, offers the deafened many vital advantages denied them until now. It adds a new dimension to hearing. Leading audiologists reveal that this enables the deaf to *understand up to 40% better* than with corrected hearing in only one ear.

Clinical tests prove that hearing full dimensionally with both ears helps the deaf these 5 wonderful ways: 1—Hear *where* sounds come from. 2—Tell the *distance* of sounds. 3—Tell *who* is talking, even in crowded, noisy places. 4—Enjoy far more *natural, life-like* hearing, free from distortion as never before. 5—End head-turning like an antenna, to catch sounds with the "good" ear.

Thousands of users of this electronic invention that revolutionizes the correction of hearing loss call it a "Godsend."

This exciting discovery—Beltone Hearing Glasses—also solves the problem of people who hesitated to wear a conventional hearing aid for fear of being stared at . . . of advertising hearing loss. Beltone scientists achieved this by completely hiding an all-transistor hearing aid and receiver inside one temple of glasses.

Gone is the once tell-tale cord, gone is the receiver button in the ear. A tiny, almost invisible tube carries sound to the ear. *Nothing* to hide in hair or clothes, no attachments behind the ear. Even close friends do not guess you wear a hearing aid.

Beltone Hearing Glasses may help you recapture happier living through normal conversation with loved ones and friends . . . blessed inspiration of church . . . full pleasure from TV, radio, movies. Beltone Hearing Glasses may be the answer to your prayers . . . enable you to become part of the everyday world again.

FREE book on request. *A fully illustrated new book explains how Beltone Hearing Glasses enable the deaf to hear with both ears and hide deafness as never before. For your free copy, without obligation, write: Dept. LH-6, Beltone Hearing Aid Co., 31 W. 47th St., New York 36, N. Y.*

the good medicine

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Meeting her was an Arabian Nights kind of episode — but coping with her had its own familiar charm. . . .

"DON'T YOU ever feel foolish about telling people you've retired and don't want to get in any more trouble?" David Stern asked.

"About as foolish as I feel when I'm asked whom I'm planning to swindle or slaughter next," Simon Templar admitted.

"That's a fine way to talk to an influential newspaper owner who is also buying you a magnificent dinner."

"I've never asked you to use your influence for me, Dave. And I also notice that you apparently didn't want to be seen with me in one of the more widely advertised food foundries that bring tourists to New Orleans from every corner of the continent, according to the guide-books."

The newspaper owner grinned.

"If you lived here, you might like a change from that fancy cooking too. And I can't imagine you acting like a tourist anywhere."

They were in Kolb's, on St. Charles Street, a restaurant whose cuisine favors (as the name implies) a tradition Teutonic rather than Creole. Thus, by a paradox of environment,

Elise Ashville made a fortune out of patent remedies and thought this would buy any man who took her fancy—and then came the Saint. . . .

what might have been commonplace in Leipzig became actually more exotic in Louisiana than the famous establishments that emphasize their French background.

"Don't think I'm complaining," said the Saint, making happy inroads on some tenderly baked duckling bedded in sauerkraut. "But you should know better than to introduce an Ulterior Motive into this pleasant session —unless it is young, beautiful, and of course uncooked."

"Like, for example, the specimen at the corner table that you have so much trouble keeping your eyes off?"

"Well, for example."

"I think he calls himself the Marchese di Copoformaggio, or some such name. But I only know what I read in the columns I buy. Possibly he's as phony as any Balkan prince of the pre-war crop. But she seems to like him —at least, as of the last press releases."

"Thank you," said the Saint politely. "You are a salt-mine of information. And now, as a purely incidental item, who is *she?*"

"As if I didn't know that was the one you were interested in. That is Elise Ashville."

"*The* Elise Ashville?"

"Of course."

"Well," said the Saint, with great patience, "who the hell is *the* Elise Ashville?"

Stern was honestly surprised. "You really don't know? She owns Ashville Pharmacal Products, Inc.—one of our bigger local industries. They make patent medicines. *Juven-Aids. VervaTonique. Dreemicreem.* You must have seen them advertised, at least."

"Gawd, who could help it? But I never had any reason to notice who made 'em."

Simon looked towards the corner table again. The woman who sat there with the pale-blond, delicate - featured, expensively tailored and shirted and accessoried type for which a previous generation's graphic term "lounge lizard" has never been bettered, was not constructed to the conventional specifications of a female tycoon. Even to refer to her as a "woman" seemed slightly heavy, although the much-abused word "girl" was equally inapplicable. She could easily have passed for much less than 30, and could not have ranked 40 by the most vicious estimate: the Saint would have personally favored the lower estimate, being a man and vulnerable to certain figures, of which she had a honey, unless the couturiers had cooked up some new gimmicks which could falsify even such a candid décolleté as she was wearing. Incontrovertibly above that she had a face of petulant but exciting beauty, capped by a casque of darkly burnished copper hair. If she

could have walked many blocks outside without eliciting an appreciative whistle, it would only have been in a blackout that coincided with a dense fog.

She was completely aware of the boldly appraising way that Simon had been looking at her, he knew, and he did not have any impression that it displeased her at all. He observed that she did not seem to have brought it to her escort's attention, as a woman will when she is annoyed by such a scrutiny.

"I'd never have visualized her in a dispensary," Simon remarked. "Or at an industrial board meeting, for that matter."

"Don't let that Vargas build fool you. As I hear it, she did most of the originating of those concoctions. And as a business woman, by all accounts, she's sent some big wheels back with their kingpins wobbling."

"Tell me more."

David Stern hospitably refilled the Saint's glass from the bottle of Alsace-Willm Gewurztraminer in the ice bucket beside them.

"I don't go in much for gossip, but this seems to be pretty factual . . ."

Whatever else she was rumored to have been before, or on the side, Mrs. Elise Ashville had certainly been a waitress at the soda fountain of Richard Ashville's modest neighborhood drug store until she married him and began to infuse her ambitious energy into his humble business. Until then, reportedly, he thought he had already attained his personal pinnacle when he became the proprietor of a store of his own (subject to a reasonable mortgage) and had been prepared to bumble placidly through his declining years retailing the standard nostrums, scraping the standard profit off cokes and comic books, and compounding such prescriptions as came his way. He was a gentle and unassuming man whose ailing mother had successfully monopolized him until she died shortly before Elise came to work for him, by which time he was well into an unsophisticated middle age; and he had been mildly astonished when this gorgeous creature accepted the proposal which his glands forced through his shyness.

It was not long after an exhausting honeymoon, however, that he discovered that her concept of a woman's part in a partnership was more vigorous than his mother's in more ways than one. Browsing along the shelves while he was taking stock after closing one night, she said: "I was reading an article about what a terrific profit there is in some of this stuff, how the ingredients in a bottle that people pay more than a dollar for are worth maybe only five cents. But *you* only make a little bit of that

profit. Why don't we put up our own mixtures and make all of it?"

Mr. Ashville painstakingly explained to her that the public would not come in and ask for these mixtures unless it had first been conditioned to think it needed them, by lavish promotion and advertising, on which the manufacturers spent a fantastic amount of the apparent gravy.

"Phooey," said the dynamic Elise. "They've got a lot of overhead and stockholders to pay, too. We can put a small ad in the local papers for a few bucks, and bottle the stuff ourselves."

From there on it was the kind of homespun success story beloved by the *Reader's Digest,* except that the end products would never have earned the endorsement of that periodical. Not that there was anything actively poisonous or even especially deleterious about the pills and potions put out by the Ashville Pharmacal factory—the Food & Drug Administration would have seen to that, even without the help of Mr. Ashville's unreconstructed conscience—but neither would they do anyone much good, other than psychologically. This trivial imperfection, however, did no perceptible harm to the sales.

Juven-Aids ("To help restore that youthful feeling") contained, for instance, only a few B-vitamins, harmless amounts of phosphorus and nux vomica, and minimal quantities of a common ataraxic; but hundreds of thousands were swallowed, three times a day after meals, by customers who were convinced that they felt better for them, or at least that they would have felt worse without them.

Dreemicreem ("For the skin a queen might envy") was something that Elise herself whipped up, literally with an egg-beater, in the beginning, out of a detergent, an astringent, some mayonnaise that had gone rancid, and a cheap perfume to disguise it: smeared on myriads of hopeful faces, just before washing with plain cold water, according to the instructions, it undoubtedly cleansed their pores as effectively as any soap, and could not have left any more wrinkles than were there to start with.

VervaTonique . . . ("Blended from the same herbs and fruits to which many ancient philosophers attributed the secret of long life and vigor") also assayed 25% alcohol by volume, if you could read the smallest print on the label; so that any of its highly respectable addicts, which included staunch supporters of the WCTU, who knocked back an ounce of it whenever they felt enervated, as the directions suggested, were benefitted by the same jolt as if they had belted a good highball down to the halfway mark, without any moral

qualms to detract from the resultant euphoria.

Elise turned out to have an unsuspected instinct, as well as a positive genius for skirting the law by juggling words into the kind of advertising claim that hinted exuberantly at miracles and only on the closest analysis could be proved to have promised practically nothing. In three breathtaking strides the local enterprise had grown to statewide, to regional, and finally to national dimensions, with the assistance of some frightening financial parlays; but it rode such an unbroken run of luck that in only five years it was in what Dun & Bradstreet called "a sound progressive condition" and could let its managing directrice draw a lavish stipend and a lush expense account with no protest from its creditors.

"So what's wrong with that?" Simon inquired. "It's hardly retailing gossip to say that they started on a shoestring and boiled it into oceans of slop that they're selling at the price of soup. Maybe their ethics are dubious, but I can't help feeling that the suckers they sell to are almost fair game."

"Without getting into that argument," said the publisher, "the rest of it is a bit less equivocal."

Mrs. Ashville, whose personality and tastes had been expanding as rapidly as her business, had begun to find the time and inclination for a more glamorous social life, which she indulged with increasingly frequent and protracted visits to New York, Palm Springs, and Miami Beach, where she became a regular feature of the cafe society columns, which reported her holding hands with a number of different squires whose impressive-sounding titles were usually better known than their credit ratings. When even the diffident Mr. Ashville rebelled against being thus publicly cuckolded, at least by inference, and suggested a divorce, she obliged him promptly. It was only then that he was reminded, by coldly practical lawyers, that she owned outright the controlling percentage of stock in Ashville Pharmacal Products, which had been founded almost indulgently as a toy for her to play with, that he had even laughingly signed a document that she brought him in the early days specifically declaring that he did not in any way regard it as community property, and that the most he could claim from the Corporation, aside from his rights as the personal holder of one paid-up share, would be the few hundred dollars he had advanced to get it started.

"So she got everything," said the Saint. "That seems to be the story in most American divorces. But for a change, there almost seems to be some justification for

it. As you tell it, she was the brains of the act. She dreamed it up and put it over. He was only the first stepping-stone. If she outgrew him after that, and wants to prove she's arrived by splurging on aristocratic gigolos, it may be deplorable, but I guess it's her privilege."

"I understand they paid him two thousand dollars."

"She might have been more generous," Simon admitted.

"He'd sold the drug store long ago, of course, when the medicine business began to take all their time. But that was already community property, and whatever it fetched went into expanding the business. When the break-up came, he was several years older, and he wasn't young to start with. To be exact, he was fifty-five at the time. And that was two years ago. Not the ideal age to make a fresh start, with no capital."

"Tough," Simon said reluctantly. "But—"

"Soon after that, he came down with TB. Then it wasn't even a matter of starting over. When his money ran out, he had to become a charity patient in the State hospital. He's there now."

The Saint blinked.

"Don't look up," Stern said, "but she seems to have signed the check, and they're headed this way. Do you want to be introduced?"

"Yes," Simon said, assiduously finishing his plate. "If you can bring yourself to gamble your good repute on my alias."

"Who do you want to be—Sebastian Tombs?"

"I think the Count of Cristamonte might appeal to her more."

He was only just able to say it in time, and then she was at the table. Even before he raised his eyes with carefully measured nonchalance, his senses were aware of a perfume, a warmth, a physical presence that seemed to send out vibrations from its own high-voltage charge.

"Relax, darling," she said, as the newspaper proprietor stood up. "I'm not going to slap you, or even make a scene."

"It never occurred to me that you would," Stern said with easy courtesy.

"I don't mean for some of those scandalous columns you've published—I know you only print what the syndicates send you. I mean, though, I hope you don't think I'm sore at you for picking on me in that Editorial the other day. How did it go?—*'Louisiana's industrial potential should not be judged solely by the unfortunate publicity earned by the personal antics of certain of our prominent commercial citizens.'* And everyone knows that I've had more publicity than any other commercial citizen of this town. That was a little bit snide, darling."

She had a naturally husky voice, and she had adapted to herself some of the mannerisms of a famously mannered Southern actress, but an interpretation of her own softened and sugared them.

"It's all right, I know you can't admit you were referring to me," she went on before the other could admit or deny anything. Especially before witnesses. But you know the Marchese isn't my attorney." For the first time she made a show of noticing the Saint. "What about *your* friend?"

"The Count of Cristamonte," Stern said, with the obligatory gesture. "Mrs. Ashville."

The momentary widening of her eyes might have been hard to measure without a micrometer, but Simon did not miss it. They were brown eyes with flecks of green, and there were hardly any telltale wrinkles around them. Even at close quarters her skin had the clear and silky texture coveted by the users of *Dreemicreem*.

There was no doubt that simply as a female she was what almost any male would have classified to himself as a Dish.

She put out her hand with more than conventional cordiality, and said: "Oh, a distinguished visitor getting the V I P treatment. Please don't be scared by anything I was just saying, about Mr. Stern. You couldn't be in better hands. I was only kidding him, in our crude American way."

"You don't have to explain," smiled the Saint, with the barest trace of some vaguely European accent. "I've been in America before. And for the pleasure of meeting you, I would forgive David anything."

She had left her hand with him when he bent over it, and it took her that long to withdraw it, as if it were something she had forgotten. She had not bothered to present the Marchese to anyone, and he was trying to appear elegantly inscrutable and aristocratically bored in the near background, to which he was strategically relegated by Mrs. Ashville's uncooperative back and the space limitations of the aisle which burdened waiters and busboys were trying to use as a thoroughfare.

She continued to look the Saint over, not a whit less candidly than he had been studying her a few minutes earlier.

"How long are you here for?"

"To my sorrow, only a few days."

"I'm sorry, too. Very sorry." She turned back to Stern at last, with a smile. "Don't worry about losing my advertising, darling. As long as your circulation figures hold up, you can make all the jokes you want to about me. Just don't knock the product . . . And be careful where you take your handsome friend. He should

go back to Europe remembering nothing but the best of this town."

With a last flashing glance at the Saint, she swept on. Her pallidly esthetic escort followed like a reactivated toy towed by a string, with a coldly perfunctory inclination of his head towards the table that had interrupted their progress, as he went by.

"That's a lot of woman," Simon observed, as they sat down again. "She transmits like a long-range radio station—and it isn't only music. I can see where a little guy in a corner drug store wouldn't have had much chance."

"She's progressed quite a bit since then."

"Sure. And there are movie stars who graduated just as recently from slinging hash. Some of 'em were smothered with sables before they were quite used to wearing shoes. But more women are natural actresses than end up in Hollywood. If they're born with the spark, and given the opportunity, they don't take long to learn the princess routines. Cinderella had to have a fairy godmother, but all the modern gal needs is the confidence that comes with a little success and a lot of money. And I say the performance can be just as much fun if you forget the pedigree."

"You turn a fine phrase, my friend. But you sound as if you were trying to sell yourself."

"If she threw herself at me, I can't pretend it wouldn't be nice to have an excuse not to duck."

"And forget the discarded husband in the charity ward? I must have had a wrong impression, but I didn't know you were as tough as that."

Simon lighted a cigarette.

"Have you printed that story? It doesn't seem like it, or she'd 've mentioned it."

"Frankly, we only got the tip yesterday. We sent someone out to check on it today, and Asheville begged him to drop it. Said Mrs. Ashville didn't know, and he didn't want her to."

"Then where did the tip come from?"

"A sister of his who phoned us. She said Mrs. Ashville knew all about it, and didn't care."

"Do you know if this sister could be bitter about something else? If Mrs. Ashville really doesn't know, you can't score it against her. Has anyone asked Mrs. Ashville? You had a chance to ask her yourself just now," said the Saint.

"I have a top-notch editor and some excellent reporters," said his host urbanely. "I don't try to do all their jobs myself. I was only telling you as much as I happened to know. You'll have to read the rest of it in the paper —if they decide it's worth printing. And I'm sorry if I spoiled the romance you didn't have."

The Saint had to laugh.

"And I'm sorry I can't make you a story, after you've tried so hard to feed me the ingredients. But things don't happen to me that way."

He was wrong, of course—any time he made a categorical statement like that, his peculiar Fate usually took it as a personal challenge and set out to make a liar of him.

An hour later, after pancakes and coffee and Benedictine, the head waiter who was bowing them out deftly slipped a folded piece of paper into the Saint's hand while seeming to almost ignore him in the exchange of compliments and banalities with the important local patron. But Simon felt the warning pressure that went with this professional legerdemain, and slid the note into his pocket without a visible flicker of attention.

He managed to read it under the street lighting, with the most unostentatious casualness, while waiting for their car at the parking lot, as if it had been a list of Things To Do In Town. In a vigorous sprawling hand, it said:

If you feel like a quiet nightcap, call me any time after eleven —Magnolia 7-5089. The name is Elise Ashville.

"Where would you like me to drop you off?" Stern asked cagily. "I'm afraid I have an important meeting first thing in the morning, but—"

"Don't worry, I don't want to be shown the Vieux Carré," said the Saint. "As a matter of fact, I took the Bourbon Street promenade last night, for old times' sake. Maybe it's old age creeping up on me, but the honky-tonks seem to get honkier and tonk'er every year. Let's have a quiet digestive dram at my hotel and call it a day."

Thus a little time passed quickly and painlessly, and a few minutes after eleven he was able to dial a pay phone in the lobby.

The voice that answered the ring had none of the charm of the traditional Southern servitor as it snapped: "Mrs. Ashville's residence. Who's calling?"

"The Count of Cristamonte," Simon said, with the accent.

"Hold on."

Then after a moment it was the voice he had been expecting, electrically rich with suggestive overtones.

"Please excuse my maid's tone of voice. I think she thinks she's working too late, or something. Are you ready for that nightcap?"

"I would like to see you again."

"Ask any taxi driver for the Elysée Apartments. The new building. I had it named for me. You work the elevator yourself. On top of all the floor buttons, there's one small green button

with no number. That's my penthouse. Will you be long?"

"No longer than this taxi will take," he said.

One reason why Simon Templar's nervous system had survived his extraordinary life with so little damage by strain and fraying was that he had an amazing gift of closing his mind to unprofitable speculation. When there was obviously nothing to be gained by trying to foreguess a situation that would soon supply its own answers, he was able to simply switch off the futile circuit and wait with only philosophical anticipation for the future to unroll itself. He saved his prophetic energy for the occasions when life and death might depend on how many moves he could stay ahead of the game, but he felt reasonably sure that this was not that kind of game.

He was even more sure when she unlocked the inside door at which the automatic elevator stopped in obedience to the small green button, and let him step out into a room that could only have been designed by an interior decorator who had studied his subject by watching old movies on television. It cried aloud for a sinuous slumber-eyed siren in a long clinging robe, possibly fondling a tame ocelot. Elise Ashville was too palpably charged with corpuscles and vitamins for that rôle, and she had not even conceded to the diaphanous négligée which any writer of a certain modern school would have considered a formal necessity for such an occasion; but the suggestion of untrammelled nakedness under the demurely neck-high and ankle-deep housecoat she had changed into was no less positive and even more effective. And her approach had a refreshing time-saving candor.

"I'm glad you weren't *too* tied up with Mr. Stern, since you aren't going to be here long."

"I think he was rather relieved that he didn't have to take me on a tour of the strip-tease joints." The Saint held his accent down to an intriguing cosmopolitan minimum, just enough to add spice to the personality he was projecting. "And your Marchese?"

"I told him I had a terrible headache."

She led the way to a long, wide, deep, and unlimitedly functional couch, flanked by a coffee table burdened with bottles of almost anything except coffee, together with glasses and an ice bucket.

"Then the only one who must be unhappy is your maid," he remarked. "She sounded quite annoyed about answering the phone."

"She was sore because I took her away from her TV set to give me a rubdown and fix me a bath and a few things like that, and then I made her wait up until

you called—that was in case anyone else called first, she could say I was out. So she'll be fired as soon as she's fixed my breakfast. I can't stand servants who think they ought to have union hours and rules. If a servant isn't a servant, what are you paying for? That's the European angle, isn't it?"

"Well, it was like that once. But today—"

"I'm going to ask the employment agency for a good hungry refugee. I couldn't do worse than with what I've been getting. But I won't bore you any more with *that*. Do you mind fixing your own nightcap?"

"I thought that was a figure of speech."

She met the intentional challenge of his gently insolent gaze without the flicker of one mascara'd eyelash.

"I suppose in Europe no lady would have sent you a note like mine?"

"No, it could happen. But a gentleman would only take it as a most generous compliment."

"You've got a nice line, darling, but you don't have to strain it. Mr. Stern must have told you a little about me. I expect you're used to getting a lot of breaks because of your title. I get them because I can pay for anything I want. And I couldn't let you get away, because I think you're the most exciting-looking man I've ever seen."

"Then you would not misunderstand my impatience to kiss the most exciting woman I have seen in America?"

It was a purely Arabian Nights kind of episode that the Saint would never have dared to relate to anyone who he did not already know to be convinced that in this amazing world anything can happen; but this subtracted nothing from his enjoyment of it, since he was not in the habit of telling that kind of story.

Churlish as it may seem to some readers, however, he did not wake up the next morning completely bemused by exquisite if implausible memories. In fact, after reviewing everything through a third cup of breakfast coffee, he found nothing more incredible than one recklessly premature pontification of his own. To retrieve that one he had to brazen out an unexpected call at a local newspaper office.

"I thought you decided last night that there was no story in it for you," Stern said, not without malice. "What happened to change your mind?"

"Nothing," Simon replied mendaciously, "except that I began to wonder if you'd think I just couldn't be bothered. Would you care to get me those other details that you didn't know last night?"

"Let's go and talk to the editor."

The editor was a composed and genial man who puffed a pipe in a relaxed manner that would have horrified any well-trained casting director. He said: "No, I haven't sent anyone to talk to this sister. Since Ashville himself was so definite about not wanting the story printed, I decided to drop it. After all, if his pride is all he's got left, and it means that much to him, we don't have to strip him of that last shred of dignity to get out an interesting edition."

"Did the sister leave any address?" Simon asked.

"Yes. I've got a note of it somewhere." The editor rummaged through the papers in a tray. "Here it is. 4818 Alamanda Street. I think that's out towards the hospital."

"I'd like to talk to her. I won't pretend that you sent me, or even let her know where I got the address. On the other hand, if I don't think you can do any good by printing anything she tells me, I won't pass it on to you. Fair enough?"

The gentlemen of the press exchanged glances.

"Well," said the editor philosophically, "since he seems to have got the address anyhow, we could call that an extravagantly generous offer."

Alamanda Street proved to be a channel of grimy and uninspired facades that ran for only two blocks—the impressive numbering of the houses was simply scaled to match the corresponding numbers on the boulevard which it paralleled. The buildings were old without having acquired any antique elegance, and somewhat oversized without stateliness. Several of them had signs offering rooms or apartments for rent, as the owners tried to eke out some revenue from their outmoded dimensions. Number 4818 was one of these, and the Saint found Miss Ashville's name on a card over one of the mail-boxes in the hall with a pencilled note in the corner *2nd floor back.*

She came to the door as soon as he knocked, and he accepted that as a good omen, having been prepared to wait all day if she had been out.

"Good morning," he said. "Could I talk to you about the call you made to the paper, about your brother?"

"You've been long enough getting here," she said. "Come in."

The room to which she admitted him was large but airless, shabbily furnished but meticulously tidy. One couch had an unmistakable air of being convertible into a bed, and he suspected that the barest essentials of a kitchenette were crowded behind an anachronistic concertina door in one corner. The contrast with the penthouse which he had left less than twelve hours

ago could hardly have been starker.

"A reporter went to see Mr. Ashville at once, but *he* said he didn't want anything printed."

"I know. And he may never forgive me for making that call."

She had waved Simon to a chair, but she remained standing, her hands folded together at her waist. She had black hair with gray strands in it that she must have washed and set herself, very accurately and unbecomingly, and she was probably not more than a year or two past forty, but she had the kind of untended face that any casual observer would say belonged to a nice homely middle-aged woman — without even a thought of the heartbreaks and frustrations that might be buried behind that callous classification.

"Before you called the paper," he said, "did you try to see Mrs. Ashville?"

"I did. More than once. But at the office she was always in a meeting. I went to her apartment, and I know she was in, because the maid took my name, but she came back and said Mrs. Ashville was not at home. Just like that. Then I wrote her a letter."

"A rude one?"

"No, a very nice one. I said that I wondered if she was avoiding me because she was afraid I was going to be a nuisance, either by blaming her for the divorce or trying to patch things up. I told her I could understand that, but I wasn't the meddling kind; and I didn't want anything from her, either. Not for myself. But I thought she ought to know about Richard. And I told her just how it was with him."

"How bad is it?"

"The doctors don't give him more than a year. Of course, with new drugs being tried all the time, you never give up hope . . . But even if he hasn't got long, it might be a little longer, and it'd certainly be a lot less horrible, if he could be taken to Arizona or Colorado or one of those places."

"Didn't she answer that?"

"Yes," said Miss Ashville grimly. "She answered. That's what I want to show you."

She went to a drawer in the battered but carefully polished bureau and brought back a letter. It was on the very heaviest pearl-gray stationery, with a very large engraved monogram in gold in one corner surrounded by a corona of twinkling effects which at the first glance would have been taken for stars but on closer scrutiny proved to be tiny coronets. It must have betrayed a powerful fixation, he thought.

The aggressive but agreeable perfume that still clung to the paper, and the impetuous self-indulgent sprawl of writing, both connected with still very lively

memories, but the tone was altogether different.

Dear Miss Ashville,

I'm sorry to hear of Richard's bad luck—which I think and hope you may be exaggerating slightly—but I must say I'm surprised he should take this sneaky way, of getting his sister to write begging letters for him.

After all, getting divorced is for better or for worse like getting married. He made a settlement which satisfied him at the time, and he can't keep trying to go back on it whenever things aren't going well for him, or when would it ever stop?

If either of you thinks you have any legal claim on me, please talk to my lawyers who will know how to deal with it.

Yours truly,

ELISE ASHVILLE.

"Brr," said the Saint.

"You see?" said the homely sister. "Of course I'm prejudiced, but she just can't be a nice person."

"Did you ever talk to the lawyers?"

"I did not. You know very well I'd have been wasting my time. That's what people like her have lawyers for. Besides, Richard hasn't any legal claim. I know it, and she knew it when she said that."

Simon glanced at the letter again.

"Had you quarrelled before? *'Dear Miss Ashville . . . Yours truly,'*—as if you'd never met."

"We haven't. Not to this day. I was abroad when they got married. I went to work for the Berlitz School in Brussels not long after the war, teaching American English—did you know that they teach both kinds? I only gave it up and came back when I realized that Richard might need someone to take care of him. I'm glad I did, but I wish I'd saved up more money. What I had put away didn't go very far."

"Have you talked to a lawyer of your own? I should think any sharp operator could cook up a case that'd at least be good enough to get into court, and that wouldn't be good publicity. Her lawyers might easily advise her to fork out something just to avoid that."

She shook her head definitely.

"That couldn't be done without Richard signing complaints and summonses and knowing all about it, and he'd never do that. He's that kind of fool, but I love him for it."

"Then what did you think the paper could do?"

"There's a kind of pride that wouldn't ask for charity, like Richard's," she said, "and another kind that can't bear to think of a wicked woman getting away with what she's done, without letting

everyone know the rottenness of her. That's my kind. I've read about her in the gossip columns since I've been back, going to the parties and the fancy restaurants, and always with some prince or baron or something, and it makes me boil over inside. If you print those stories, I think you ought to print the other things that are just as true. Perhaps it won't do Richard any good, I've got to resign myself to that anyhow, but it'd be an eye-opener to some of her fine friends."

"I'm afraid," said the Saint cynically, "that nothing would shock most of them, except if she ran out of money."

"Do you think I'm just being vindictive?"

He considered her levelly.

"Yes. And I thoroughly approve. I often think the world could use a lot more vindictiveness—only I'd rather call it righteous indignation. I had to see you to make up my mind, but you've convinced me—you and this letter—that something has to be done."

He gave the letter back to her, and she took it reluctantly.

"Then why don't you keep it and publish it?"

"I can't." Simon had not forgotten his promise to Stern and the editor, and he kept it scrupulously. "I hope you won't think I've taken advantage of you, but I never said I was a newspaper man. I just let you assume it. My name is Templar, and I am sometimes called the Saint."

Even though she had spent the last ten years in Belgium, the durability or the international scope of his reputation were reflected in the enlargement of her eyes.

"You . . . But how . . ."

"I have ways of hearing all sorts of things," he said glibly. "Don't ask me how I got interested in your brother's case, because I couldn't tell you the truth. But I'm going to work on it."

"If there's anything I can do to help you—"

"I wouldn't be bashful about asking, believe me. But I don't know yet what *can* be done." But already, under an air of vaguely discouraged perplexity, his brain was racing. "The only thing I'm sure of is that given enough time I usually dream up something."

When he phoned Elise Ashville, after lunch, she answered the ring herself, but her voice was cold and almost unrecognizable until he gave his fictitious identity. Then it became warm and langorous.

"Darling. When do I see you again?"

"What are you doing?"

"Getting ready to go to the office. Got to make a few decisions and do a few chores. But for this evening, you name it."

"What about your Marchese?"

"He can dry up and blow away. He woke me up at nine o'clock this morning, calling to ask how my headache was. I told him I had a wonderful night but he was spoiling my beauty sleep." She laughed, intimately. "I'll tell him I want to be alone and go to bed early tonight, to make up for it. Whatever you say."

"I was teasing," he said. "I have to catch the plane to Chicago in two hours, to see about a deal there. You remember, I told you yesterday I was not entirely a gentleman of leisure."

"I don't remember you telling me anything about your business. We were much too busy, weren't we?"

"For me, to mix business and pleasure is like mixing champagne and vinegar. The result is all vinegar, no champagne. I prefer us to be all champagne. You will still be here next Tuesday, if I can finish talking to these dreary pill makers and fly back?"

"You've got a date. But *what* dreary pill makers?"

"I shall tell you when it is all over. Until Tuesday, then, most wonderful Elise!"

He figured that that should be just enough to keep her nagged by an intermittent but persistent bug of curiosity, which by Tuesday should have piqued her to an ideal pitch of receptivity. But just in case it should torment her into trying to beat his timing, he made one more phone call, to David Stern.

"I've talked to Ashville's sister, and kept your paper out of it, as we agreed. By the same token, I haven't anything to tell you. Except thanks."

"But are you going to do anything?"

"If I told you what I had in mind, you mightn't approve. I don't want you to sprain your conscience. And another thing. If I happened to make Elise very angry with me, it's just possible she might include you for having introduced me. Personally I think she'd swallow it and keep quiet, rather than admit that anyone got the best of her, but I'd hate to expose you to the risk. So if she checks with you again, you never saw the Count of Cristamonte before and you didn't vouch for him. I simply came to the office, introduced myself, and started asking a lot of questions about local industrial conditions, and finally talked you into having lunch. I said I wasn't free yet to tell you what I might be interested in manufacturing, except that it was something sensational in the medical field."

"That's all very well," protested the publisher, "but I think you owe it to me—"

"To save you from being an accessory before the fact," said the Saint. "One day, when I'm sure there's not going to be a squawk, I may tell you more.

Meanwhile, let this be a lesson to you not to get involved with shady characters like me."

Again he hung up, before he could be pinned down by any more questions than he was inclined to answer.

As a matter of record, he did not fly to Chicago, but drove a hundred miles in the opposite direction, down to the Gulf coast and the picturesque outpost of Grand Isle at the end of the road, to sample the fabled fishing in the bayous and out around the off-shore oil rigs. He spent a very innocent and refreshing three days, and drove back to New Orleans on Tuesday afternoon only because he had committed himself. It was a sacrifice for which he felt thoroughly entitled to a halo.

He called Elise Ashville as soon as he had checked in at one of the elegant new motels on the Airline Highway, and was put through with flattering speed by her office secretary. Her own voice, in spite of a brave attempt at complacency, confirmed that the splinter he had deliberately planted had not stopped plaguing her.

"Darling. I hope you had a very dull trip."

"Terribly dull—but profitable," He had not forgotten his accent. "Do we still have our date?"

"I was counting on it. I sent the Marchese to Mexico—to find out if it really isn't too hot at this time of year. How were your dreary pill-makers?"

"Very dreary, but very nice to me. If I call for you at your flat at seven, will that give you time to have relaxed and made yourself beautiful?"

"Make it seven-thirty. I must be specially fascinating. You don't know how you've tortured me, and now I shall drive you mad until I find out what you've been up to."

"I shall enjoy that," he said.

She was not used to men being confident and casual enough to have that note of carefree mockery in their voices when they spoke to her, and it sent unfamiliar currents tingling through her spine.

Enjoying a soothing facial massage and a stimulating body rub from her new maid, who was a trifle clumsy but much more obsequious and uncomplaining than the last one, she wondered whether this adventure might turn into something more durable than the others. She was not naturally promiscuous so much as amoral and ambitious: the discovery that with wealth added to her considerable physical endowments she could use titled playboys as playthings had gone to her head but had not completely turned it. To pick up and discard them at a whim flattered the ego of an ex-waitress; but to marry one merely for his title, with all

the world knowing as well as she that that was all she had bought, would have violated every principle of the same plebeian common sense.

But as the Countess of Cristamonte, if he was actually even solvent in his own right . . . She toyed lazily with the name while she wallowed lengthily in the oiled and foamed and scented water of her sunken Roman bath. It was not so bad. Of course, she had sometimes dreamed of a Prince, but there were hardly any genuine ones left whom you could meet outside of a real palace, and most of them were either too young or too old. She might do worse than this, and she certainly wouldn't have to apologize for him physically . . . While she allowed herself to be fluff-dried and powdered (she had observed these symbols of supreme luxury in a movie when she was a little girl, and in a depression would have slashed her office overhead to the bone before she dispensed with any of them) she almost accepted his proposal, and abruptly recalled that he had not yet made it. But that could be arranged, if the other qualifications were in order. Tonight she would be sure to have time to probe further into that.

"You can leave as soon as you've tidied up, Germaine," she said, as she sat pencilling her eyebrows. "And don't come crashing in early in the morning."

"*Oui, madame.* At vat hour do you vish me to be 'ere?"

"Not a minute before ten-thirty," The maid might have to get used to some highly Bohemian goings-on eventually, but there was no point in shocking her into a dither in the first few days. "I know I'll be up very late tonight, and I won't want to be disturbed."

"I understand, *madame.*"

By the time she opened the door herself to the Saint's ring, she had an excited feeling that the wheel of Fortune was spinning into a pattern loaded with her numbers—which only proves how misleading such hunches can be.

"Darling," she said. "You're terribly punctual."

"Should I have pretended I did not care if I waited another hour to see you?" He kissed her hand with a flourish, but went no farther except with eloquent eyes; and she thought that only a truly sophisticated gentleman would have had the gumption, in the circumstances, not to try to muss up a lady's freshly perfected makeup at the very start of the evening. "I cannot play these games, especially after the games I have had to play since I was here."

"You look very healthy for a man who's spent a week end in Chicago."

"Only because on Saturday and Sunday I have to go out to the country clubs, or the yacht clubs," he said quickly. "I have only one thing against America: when a business man wants to take you away for a change from the office atmosphere—be careful! When he gets you to take off your coat, he is planning to take your shirt."

"Is that what those dreary pill-makers did to you?"

"Yes. No. That is, they tried, but they didn't. I think I made a good deal."

"Darling. You're at home here, remember? Make us a cocktail." She settled into her corner of the oversize couch. "The very driest Martini, for me."

He stirred up some Romanoff vodka with ice, and allowed four drops of Cazalis & Prats to fall in the pitcher.

"You see? I am learning all the tricks of an American business man."

"Why do you want to be an American business man?"

"Because, alas, I don't have the temperament of a gigolo. When I compliment a beautiful woman, I want her to believe me, and not think I am complimenting her bank account. Here's an American compliment for you: you look good enough to eat. Is that why I would be called a wolf?"

She laughed.

"Well, you won't have to prove it that way. I've made a reservation for us at Antoine's."

"No."

Her head went back a fraction of an inch, as if jolted by a tiny invisible blow, and her eyebrows went up.

"Why not? It's the most famous place in New Orleans."

"That is the first reason. I have seen nothing but famous places for so many days now that I'm bored with them. Second," he ticked the list off on his fingers, smiling disarmingly—"where I come from, it is the custom for a man who is taking a woman to dinner to choose the place. Unless she is paying, which I've told you does not agree with me. Third, I did not plan to go to any restaurant, which would be crowded and noisy and either too stuffy or too air-conditioned. For us, this time, I wanted something quite different."

"Don't tell me you want to cook something here!"

"Do I already look so domesticated?" he said reproachfully. "No, I am thinking much more romantically. It came to me while I was on the plane, thinking of you and of our first real date. What would be quite different, I thought, from the first date to which anyone else would invite her? So I had an idea. I remembered I noticed last night it was almost a full moon. I had time after I got here to hire a car, to make inquiries, to

drive around. I found a place beside the lake, at the end of a road, fifteen or twenty miles out of town, away from all the traffic and the people, with the most beautiful big trees and nice ground to park; and there I decided we would have a picnic."

She stared at him with mounting incredulity.

"A *picnic?* Are you kidding?"

"Ah, but you are thinking of the American or the English picnic. The blanket spread on the ground, the sand in the sandwiches, the ants in the warm beer. I shall show you how a civilized Frenchman picnics."

"In these clothes? And after you told me to get all dressed up for you—"

"Certainly. In the car I have folding chairs, a folding table, even a tablecloth. I have knives and forks and plates and napkins. In a large box of ice I have caviar, vichyssoise, prawns in aspic, pheasant glazed with truffles —all from one of the best kitchens in town—a salad needing only to be mixed, and a magnum of Bollinger. For music, I provide some of the world's greatest orchestras—on records. You will be served as well as you could be in the finest restaurant, if only I don't spill anything. But all this, and the moon on the water, we shall have all to ourselves."

"You and me and the mosquitoes," she said, though his dramatic enthusiasm was so enchanting that her tone of voice was softened in spite of herself. "Darling. We'd be eaten alive!"

He shook his head.

"I had already thought of that too."

He reached for her hand and held it open, and took a small gold box from his pocket and tipped out a pill into her upturned palm. The pill was a little larger than an aspirin tablet, pink and sugar-coated. Then he poured her a glass of water.

"Take it."

"What's the idea?" she demanded suspiciously. "Is this one of those happy-dope pills that you think'll make me agree to anything, or just not care how much I get bitten?"

"No, it isn't. I give you my word of honor that it cannot possibly harm you, or upset you, or affect your good judgment. It isn't an aphrodisiac, or a drug that will place you at my mercy."

"Well, those are two things I wasn't worrying about." She raised the pill to her lips, and stopped again. "If I take it, will you promise to answer my next question?"

"I promise."

She put the tablet in her mouth and washed it down.

"Now," she said, "tell me what your business was with those pill-makers in Chicago."

"It was about this pill."

"Don't cheat. A full answer."

He grinned ruefully.

"Now you have cheated me. I was looking forward so much to having you try to seduce the answer from me. Instead, I am trapped . . . Very well. They were bargaining for the formula of this pill, which will keep all mosquitoes and gnats and such nuisances away from you for the rest of the night. So do you have any more arguments against my picnic?"

"You're crazy, but you did make it sound exciting and different," she said slowly. "But this pill business—that's the craziest of all."

"You see how important it will be? No more people dabbing themselves with sticky smelly things to chase the bugs, and never doing it quite enough. Just one little pill two or three times a day, and you can forget that they exist. A little aroma comes through all your pores, nothing that you or your best friends could detect, but to the nose of a bug—*ppheuw!*"

"I'd heard of them trying to find something like that, but I didn't know they'd got it yet."

He freshened the remains in the pitcher and refilled their glasses.

"I am lucky to have it first. Let me finish this full answer quickly, so that we can be gay again. My father's hobby was exploring. He made many expeditions in South America; but because he was only a titled amateur, with no scientific qualifications, his discoveries were not taken seriously and often they were not even believed. Even the books he wrote he had to pay to have published—and of course they were not even translated in English. He was writing another when he died a few years ago. I read it, as a duty. He told how he had wondered how natives could live naked in a jungle with bugs that would drive an unprotected white man insane in a few hours, and how he could not believe the white men who thought it was only because the savages were used to it or didn't feel it. He searched for another answer, and found it in the nut of a certain tree that they eat."

"It sure sounds nutty to me—but I'm listening."

Simon shrugged.

"Being his son, I am a little nutty too. I went back up the Amazon where he had been—of course, it's much easier today. I found the tribe he had visited, and the tree, which he described very well. I tried the nuts, which are so horrible that after one bite you would prefer the mosquitoes, but no mosquitoes came near me. Then I knew how I could make an honest living. Is that enough, and do we go for a picnic?"

"I suppose I should have my head examined," she said inventively, "but this I have got to see. Only if it doesn't live up to the

billing, it could be the end of a beautiful friendship."

"Agreed. At the very first bite of a bug, we shall throw everything in the lake and drive back to Antoine's."

But on the drive out to the place he had picked, she could no more resist pumping him with other questions than she could have cut out her own tongue. What was the tree? He didn't know, he wasn't a botanist. He'd simply gambled on having several tons of the nuts husked and powdered by cheap Indian labor, and rafted down to the coast at Belem, where he stored the sacks in a warehouse. But the pills? He'd taken a few pounds of the flour back to Europe, had tablets hand-made by a pharmacist friend, even telling him that they were only supposed to be a kind of general tonic. However, he had decided that the pills could be most profitably manufactured and exploited in the United States, and he had been negotiating with four of the biggest drug companies.

"It has not been quite as easy as I expected," he said. "You see, I couldn't give them a regular formula, and I dared not give them samples to make their own tests, because they could analyze them, and your modern chemists are so clever that they might quickly find a way to make the same thing synthetically without even identifying the tree. So I had to make my own demonstrations, and see that every pill I gave out was swallowed. It made many problems. But this company in Chicago was most interested."

"Then what brought you to New Orleans?"

"I'd also wondered about starting a small factory myself, and I thought I might be at home here with its Continental traditions. That is why I was talking to Mr. Stern. But when I went back to Chicago, these people were ready to discuss a deal, and I decided it might be wiser to let them have the headaches with the government and the unions."

"But Mr. Stern must have told you who I was, after he introduced us the other night."

"Yes, naturally."

"And you never told me a word about it."

"We were too busy, weren't we?" he quoted her naughtily. "And if I had started trying to sell you my pills the first moment we were alone together, what would you have thought?"

She had no reply to that, but her active mind kept on working all the rest of the way to the place where he took her. Beyond any doubt he had the kind of presence and personality she had sometimes dreamed of, but she had not created and become the queenpin of Ashville Pharmacal Products merely by dreaming.

When he stopped the car, she

got out at once and strolled and stood around while he deftly and cheerfully set up lanterns, unfolded chairs and table, and unloaded boxes of utensils and provender. It was indeed a lovely spot, cool and clean-smelling, framed in ancient trees bearded with Spanish moss, with the dark mysterious expanse of Lake Pontchartrain lapping sleepily up to the shore and a round yellow moon rising high; but all she was interested in was the insect life.

Innumerable flying things fluttered and dived drunkenly around the lamps, and from the shadows came myriads of mosquitoes with a ceaseless hum of tiny tireless wings. She could even see them flickering speckily past her eyes, and hear the rise and fall of individual hungry hoverings around her, while even tinier gnats whined thinly past like diminutive rockets. But not once did the whine build into the typical infuriating crescendo of a gnat's kamikaze plunge directly into the earhole, and she could watch her bare gleaming arms without seeing them darkened by the settling of a single mote of disrespectful voracity. Her expectant shoulders and back and legs waited for the hair-touch of an almost weightless landing and the microscopic stab of the first probing sting, but time went on and they felt nothing. And she knew that to be first on the market with a pill that would accomplish such a miracle would make what by any standards could be literally called a fortune.

There was soft music coming from the portable player, and he was spooning caviar on to the first plates on the neatly laid table.

"Come, Elise, sit down and relax," he said. "You know by now that nothing is going to bite you."

"It's amazing," she said, as she let him seat her. "I must know—did those pill-makers give you a good deal?"

"Not too bad," he answered with no embarrassment. "It will be a royalty of ten cents a hundred, with a guarantee of fifteen thousand dollars a year, and they pay ten thousand at once for the stuff I have in Belem—that is, if there is no hitch."

"How do you mean? Isn't it signed yet?"

"The president of the company has to give the final okay, and he's been on vacation in Honolulu. He will be back tomorrow, and it will be one of the first things they put up to him. They wanted me to wait, but I told them I had a date here that I could not break. Anyway they can phone me, and I can fly back in a few hours."

"They're robbing you," she said intensely. "I'm a pill-maker myself, and I know. If your pills are worth anything, they're worth twice as much. I'll prove

it to you. I'll double their offer right now."

The cork popped from the bottle he was working on.

"Please," he said with a gesture. "No vinegar."

"Baloney. If you won't give me a business break, you're robbing me as well as yourself, and that'd make anything sour."

"But I've practically given my word—"

"They haven't given theirs, have they? They can still back out and not owe you a nickel. So if they can't close a deal because somebody's on vacation, that's their bad luck. Be an American business man. Send 'em a wire tonight and tell 'em all bets are off."

"Elise, suppose you are only talking from the Martinis, or the moon, or because you like me a little? Suppose in the morning you wake up and decide you have been foolish? You tell *me* all bets are off. Then where am I?"

"You don't know me very well, Buster, but I get your point. All right. When we get home, I'll give you my personal check for twenty thousand. You take it to the bank as soon as they open—"

"And they immediately call the police."

"Not with the note I'll give you. There'll be a code word that tells them it's okay. And then right away you put in a long distance call to Chicago and tell those jerks you already made a better deal. We'll talk to my attorneys about the contract later in the day. Is that good enough for you?"

It was easily as good as anything he could have proposed himself, but he let her spend most of an exceptionally delightful meal selling it to him.

When Mrs. Elise Ashville let herself wake up by sybaritically easy stages the next morning, and finally focused her eyes on the bedside clock, it showed ten minutes past eleven.

She squirmed, yawned, stretched, and sprawled again in the enormous bed, draining the last raptures of sleepy recollection, until she suddenly realized that some faint sounds of activity in the apartment should have aroused her somewhat before that.

Either the new maid was going to prove as unreliable as her predecessors, or she was a potential jewel who crept in and moved around like a mouse.

Mrs. Ashville yawned again and sat up, in an unwontedly agreeable and optimistic mood which could not have been solely due to the single pink vitamin-complex pill that Simon Templar had persuaded her to take the night before.

"Germaine," she called—quite dulcetly, at first.

There was no response, even

after louder repetitions. Germaine Ashville, having done her part by giving her sister-in-law a facial with almost pure ethylhexanediol, and pouring two full quarts of it into her bubble bath, and even spiking all her colognes and perfumes with the same popular odorless insect repellent, was already boarding a plane to Denver with her brother, and the Saint was seeing them off.

GENTLEMAN MURDERER

The Marquis Alain de Bernardy de Sigoyer, in those last minutes allowed him to smoke a final cigarette and to drink a last glass of rum, could look back upon an unusually interesting life. Descendant of one of the barristers who had defended Louis XVI before the Convention of 1793, Bernardy had spent much of his adult life in and out of courts, prisons and asylums, for everything from fraud to theft.

And finally murder.

Alain de Bernardy was a slim and rather elegant gentleman, his neatly trimmed beard giving him a scholarly air. While the ladies found him charming, the police (in Paris, Berlin, Vienna, Sofia, Venice and elsewhere) had found the swindler and con man quite interesting.

The Marquis had married Janine Kergot in 1939. The Germans entered Paris the following June, and Bernardy proved one of those who were quite willing to adjust. Very willing. It was later estimated that he had made over thirty million francs during the Occupation, and some thought he had believed that a slight case of murder would not be held against him by his friends, when he decided, some months after they had separated, to dispose of his wife. She was annoying him.

Janine de Bernardy came to see him that morning in March of 1944, apparently to discuss the Court Order that had granted her 10,000 francs a month. She sat down in a red armchair in the bedroom. A witness said she was smiling as he passed the cord around her neck, then pulled on it with his knee against the chair. She "threw up her hands, her legs were stretched out in front of her," and it was over.

The collaborationist Marquis naturally became the patriot Marquis, later in 1944, but it did not help and he was arrested as a collaborator. The question of what had happened to his wife soon came up. He protested at the trial that it was not he who had killed her, but the evidence was against him.

At 4:59 on the morning of June 11, 1947, he approached the guillotine, looked calmly at the headless body of the man who had preceded him, and murmured "Mes respects, Messieurs," to the surrounding officials, as his head was placed in position. Seconds later the Marquis Alain de Bernardy de Sigoyer, adept in black magic, swindler and gentleman murderer, was dead.

battle of wits

by . . . Aaron Marc Stein

Lucy Liz had been a delicate little thing – before marriage. She had been gentle and sweet –before she had hooked him....

THERE were moments when Hugh Travis could quite honestly wish that he were not as he was, not so much better than everyone else he knew, not so much more clever, so much more handsome, so much more attractive. Quite honestly, perhaps, is putting it something too strongly since his capacity for honesty was narrowly limited; but in these moments, which he did occasionally have, he was straining that capacity to its utmost limits and within those limits he was wishing it. He was ready to swap all his superiorities for just the one. He was ready to settle simply for being free.

The moments, however, were his moments of weakness and they were only occasional. That was another aspect of his superiority, his strength of character. He could always snap himself out of this passing weakness since he knew that destiny didn't make any bargains with Hugh Travis. He had been given his share of gifts and freedom had been one of them. Stupidly he had lost that freedom but he was completely confident that he had

A photograph was once published showing our Editorial Director talking to Hampton Stone (Inner Sanctum), George Bagby and Aaron Marc Stein (Crime Club). All are well known, all looked alike and are the same man—Aaron Marc Stein—author, by now, of more than thirty novels under the three pseudonyms.

all the wit he needed to regain it.

Hugh Travis had made a mistake, but it was such a mistake as other men had made before him. Lucy Liz had been a delicate little thing. She had been pretty. She'd had cute and appealing ways. She had been fun. Hugh Travis had married her. She hadn't told him that she was somewhat older than he was, but he had known it. What he hadn't known was just how much older. He had not known how nearly spent she had been when he had first met her.

They married and almost immediately, within a matter of months, in fact, Lucy Liz had fallen on her face. It was one of those mysterious things. For years she had been making the race. She had been right in there in the thick of the competition. She had been out to get herself a man. It may well have been that by the time Hugh Travis had come along, she had been ready to give the whole thing up, that even without him she might just have given up trying.

Lucy Liz, however, had been spared any such surrender. Even if she had had to wait for it until she had been well down the stretch in the last lap, she had gotten herself her man and, having him, she had relaxed. Hugh Travis watched this relaxation with horror. Even as he watched, he could see her face puff and sag, he could see the flabby flesh accumulate. Hers had been the sort of prettiness that is quick to fade and she had snared Hugh Travis when she had been just short of the fading point.

He had known from the first that she was a fool, but that hadn't bothered him. He had a taste for silly women so long as they were pretty. The trouble was that Lucy Liz had not been pretty long. As a wife, he had found her frowsy, fat, stupid, and stubborn. She was stubborn about everything, but there was the one thing about which she was completely intractable and that was divorce. Hugh Travis tried infidelity, but it didn't anger her. It only made her whimper and complain. He thought of a better way. He switched to fidelity. He set himself up as the model husband.

Lucy Liz developed a taste for gin fizzes. Hugh Travis became a great hand at concocting them. Her appetite was stronger than her stomach and morning after morning she went through an agony of hangover, but Hugh Travis knew that nobody died of hangovers. She was much addicted to taking pills and her doctor kept her supplied with harmless ones. Hugh Travis played along.

Within her dimwitted capacity for happiness, he made her happy. Adding the attentions of a model husband to her already balanced diet of sentimental fiction, gin fizzes, pills, and chocolates, he made her feel that Lucy

Travis was the most fortunate woman in all of creation. He fetched her slippers. He fetched her wraps. He hovered over her solicitously and protectingly. He mastered her schedule of meretricious medicaments, always remembering that it was time for another of her pills in just that split second before she would herself think to ask for it. Best of all, however, he even added an ingredient to her already formidable pharmacopaeia.

He did something her doctor had never quite succeeded in doing. He brought to her some measure of relief from the miseries of hangover.

The day-to-day consumption of gin fizzes mounted steadily because with drinks, as with the pills, he always managed to anticipate her wish for one and, since he mixed such extraordinarily delicious drinks, he could, by simply putting a frosty glass in his wife's hand, even create a wish he hadn't actually anticipated.

Hugh did his job well. They were the ideal couple. Their marriage was a small pocket of perfect delight in an otherwise alien and not too agreeable world, and then Hugh Travis came down with that badly infected hand. It was no accident. Hugh Travis was a strong man, a man of resolution, and he permitted no accidents. Hugh Travis was also a kind man, and, since his wife had a horror of the sight of blood, he withdrew into privacy. Hugh Travis was quite alone when he took the razor and with neat, surgical calculation sliced into the ball of his thumb.

When he had finished, he surveyed his work with pride and gratification. The bandage was neat and it was gleaming white, to all appearances impeccable. Underneath, however, it was just as septic as Hugh Travis knew how to make it. He did have the faintly rueful thought that he might have done better if he could have allowed himself better facilities. Abhorring the accidental, as he did, he would like to have had a laboratory and a microscope. Then he could have worked with perfect certainty, breeding up just the right strain of microbe for his purpose, immersing the gauze in the prepared culture, laying the gauze over his slashed thumb.

He knew, however, that he could never successfully explain a microscope. Even a perfectionist had to make himself content with working with the facilities available. Hopefully he had rubbed dirt into the cut. Hopefully he soiled the inner side of the dressing before he applied it.

When Lucy Liz exclaimed over the bandaged hand, Hugh made light of it. With manly courage he refused to complain. He went on in his usual way, doing for her all the little things he had

previously done, albeit clumsily. In time the hand did infect and, as it puffed and fevered and grew increasingly painful, Hugh Travis grew increasingly clumsy. It never got so bad that he couldn't serve up the gin fizzes and the pills, but it did reach the place where he was quite unable to cope with all the hooks and fastenings that did up his wife's clothes, the little catches she had at the back of her necklaces, the buttons and the zippers and the snap fasteners. That night when the daylong succession of gins had taken their usual toll, he was unable to undress her and put her gently in her bed as he always did. He couldn't even manage to lift her from where she had fallen. He had to leave her to sleep the night on the floor in all her clothes and jewelry.

The next morning Lucy Liz struggled up from the floor and went to the refrigerator for her customary morning dose of her husband's hangover medicine. He had prepared it against her waking as he always did—the jigger of whiskey, the jigger of tomato juice, the dash of lemon, the heavy lacing of hellfire in the form of cayenne pepper. She drank it down as always and, as always, it made her violently sick. As always, he withdrew until she had quite finished her horrible retching. That was one of the attributes of the perfect husband. Hugh Travis was tactful. He had just that delicacy that a fine-grained wife looked for in a man.

When he did finally join her, he found her worried and concerned about him. She was ignoring the fact that she had not wanted for her hangover cure, that, as always, she had found the ashtrays emptied and all the glasses they had used the night before washed and dried and standing on the kitchen table. Hugh had done every one of the self-imposed tasks he had accustomed her to expect, all but the job of undressing her and getting her into bed. He apologized for the omission and, when she insisted that his neglect of his hand had gone far enough and that he must go at once to have her doctor look at it, he did fall in with her wishes. He made it clear, however, that he was going only because he couldn't allow himself to be so far incapacitated that he could no longer take a husband's proper care of his little wife.

He did go to the doctor and with complete gravity and fresh, bright interest he listened to the doctor's instructions for soaking the infected thumb in a solution of bichloride of mercury.

"You can't be too careful with the stuff," the doctor told him. "It's one of the worst of the poisons. You may know it under the name of corrosive sublimate, but under either name, if you are

careless with it and happen to swallow any, it's sudden and painful death. Never leave the tablets lying around. Never leave the solution around even for a minute when you are through using it."

Hugh Travis took the bluish tablets home. He followed the physician's instructions to the letter. He couldn't have been more careful. Religiously he locked the tablets away and pocketed the key before he ever made Lucy Liz even her first gin fizz of the day.

After only a couple of days of the antiseptic soaks in the faintly blue solution, the infection cleared and after that the hand healed quickly. Hugh Travis was again quite able to cope deftly with even those most difficult hooks of girdle and brassiere. Life resumed its even tenor but Lucy Liz never forgot that awful time "when your poor hand was infected and those lovely, baby-blue tablets helped you so much."

"Those lovely, baby-blue tablets are a deadly poison," Hugh Travis would tell her.

"I don't care what they are, honey darling. They did wonders for you and I can't see why you threw out the left-over ones. You never know when you might be needing them again."

"If I need them again, doc will give me some more, darling," Hugh would say. "They're much too dangerous to keep around."

He didn't tell her that he knew quite well just when he was going to need them again. He also didn't tell her that there would never be any knowing how much it was the bichloride of mercury that had effected his miraculous cure and how much it had been merely the fact that he had stopped the deliberate dirtying of his dressings.

He kept the idyll of their marriage going and he waited patiently. The date had been set and he knew he didn't have too long to wait. Lucy Liz was taking him home. Home, of course, was in the Spanish-moss and hush-puppy South where she insisted that the long, lazy, drinking afternoons were so different from the long, brisk, drinking afternoons "up here in this Yankee country of yours." Home was where Bill Honey lived, and Jack Honey, and Neil Honey, and Joshua Honey.

Hugh, who was never honey but always honey darling, used to tease her gently about what he called the Honey boys. It delighted her when he pretended to think that they were brothers and that Honey was actually their surname.

"Silly," she would say. "You know very well they're all my old beaus and they're all going to be just madly jealous when they meet you, honey darling."

They went home and Hugh

Travis met the Honeys. None of them gave any evidence of being at all jealous, much less madly so. Bill and Jack were big chested, big shouldered, big bellied men and each in his own way had the authoritative manner. Bill was the local doctor and Jack the local sheriff. Neil and Joshua were just locals—little, dessicated men. Hugh Travis found them a dull lot. The most gifted one was Jack. Jack juggled. He juggled expertly and interminably. Hugh Travis tired of that very quickly. Hugh could see that Lucy Liz was stacking this man she had married up against the Honeys. He could see that she was preening herself on how well she had done; but, nevertheless, she did like having them strung along the verandah through the long, lazy, drinking afternoons.

"They're still mad about me, poor dears," she would tell Hugh.

"They like my gin fizzes as much as she does," Hugh would tell himself.

Whether as a result of the one attraction or the other, Lucy Liz did have her frieze of Honeys draped along her verandah through the afternoons. Assiduously, day after day Hugh Travis kept the flow of gin going and as assiduously day after day he kept going along with it his flow of charm. Only one preoccupation was allowed to occasion any interruption of either. Never was any of the little self-imposed tasks of the attentive husband neglected. That role Hugh Travis played to the hilt.

Quickly he became the talk of the community and Saturday nights at the club he made it a point to overhear snatches of this talk. People were wondering about him. How could a man of his great gifts endure even one day of Lucy Liz's company? Hugh heard and for some time he pretended not to hear. He had foreseen even this, that the question would come up. He had his carefully calculated plan for dealing with it and he was going to deal with it, but only according to plan.

The first time he overheard it, the man who said the words was much too small. This was something that had to be handled finally and clearly. There could be left in the community mind not the slightest residue of doubt. Hugh Travis could easily have knocked the little man down, but that would have seemed brutal, and brutality must never enter the picture.

The next time it was a man who was quite big enough, but again Hugh Travis waited and bided his time. This fellow was in good shape. Hugh thought there was a good chance he could take the man—an excellent chance if he could use any of the tricks he knew—but Hugh

Travis didn't want a chance. He had to have certainty. This was an operation of great precision he had embarked upon and there was to be no element of accident in it. The tricks that could so easily eliminate any possibility of accident he couldn't allow himself. It was not to be a fight in which nothing counted but winning. It was to be a theatrical performance and Hugh Travis had cast himself for it in the role of hero. He was, furthermore, to be the Galahad sort of hero, invested with right as well as might.

Hugh Travis was not a patient man. He was always wanting to get the show on the road, but this show of his he had well on the road and he did have all he needed of that special sort of patience it took to keep the thing going at its right pace, not moving too quickly, never too slow. It was essential that there should be a fight, but it had to be precisely the right fight, one he was certain to win and one from which he could emerge looking good. Hugh Travis would settle for nothing short of perfection, not a tarnished victory such as he might have had with the little man, not a risk of defeat such as was inherent in tangling with the big man.

He waited and, as inevitably it had to come, the fight he wanted did come his way. It was a big man again but this time it was one he knew had gone quite soft enough.

With this man he played his role. This had once been duelling country and it was with all the graceful ceremony of the duelist that Hugh Travis invited the man outside.

"You can't talk that way about any lady when I'm around," he said.

It was just the correct speech and there was every reason why it should have been. Hugh Travis had been rehearsing it through all the time he had been waiting and he had it polished to a fine finish. It had just the correct touch. He was too much the gentleman to speak his wife's name, or, for that matter, the name of any lady, in connection with this distasteful but necessary brawling, but at the same time he was too much the gentleman and too much the genuinely loving and devoted husband to allow any disparagement of Lucy Liz to be uttered in his hearing.

It was a good fight. It was, in fact, quite the perfect fight. It went exactly as Hugh Travis had planned it, not quite David and Goliath but with a bit of that aura to it. Hugh Travis was outweighed a good twenty pounds. That these were twenty pounds of fatty impediment his opponent was carrying about with him did not matter. He had done better than pick on a man his own size. He had stood up to a bigger

man and he had fought cleanly and fairly and he had knocked the bigger man down. If anyone had realized that he had had every advantage, Hugh Travis had so conducted himself that he had made it seem only the advantage that came of clean living.

After the fight, he still took pains to overhear the talk around the club and what he heard satisfied him. He had made his necessary point. Nobody was asking any more what motive Hugh Travis could possibly have in staying married to Lucy Liz. Now they were saying that he was a prince of fellows and nobody's fool.

"He must have found something in Lucy Liz that the rest of us have been missing out on."

That was the essence of it and it was just the way Hugh Travis wanted it. For his purpose, it had to be this way. He had known from the first it would be a point he would have to establish. It was quite necessary that it be universally recognized that he wanted to be married to Lucy Liz.

Even then, however, he had not completed his preparations. There was one more detail still to be covered. That one, alone, proved to be more difficult than Hugh Travis had anticipated. Setting up the general framework for it could hardly have been easier. There was always the early part of the day when Lucy Liz, sleeping late, had no need of him. During those hours the model husband was free of his web of self-imposed obligations and during those hours several times each week the model husband would invite Bill Honey and Jack Honey to shoot with him over Lucy Liz's overgrown acres.

That was the easy part of it. Getting them back to the house at just the right time was the obstacle. Time and again he thought he had it, and time and again he would just miss. They would be too early and even his most artfully mixed drinks couldn't keep them until Lucy Liz would have wakened and come downstairs. Then other times they would be just too late. They would return to the house and find Lucy Liz already started on her day, quite ready for the first of her gin fizzes.

Hugh Travis waited. Fortunately he enjoyed the shooting and he found Bill Honey and Jack Honey excellent hunting companions. He waited and he rode with his luck. One day inevitably they would make it at just the right time and one day they did. They came into the house just after Lucy Liz had taken her hangover remedy and they could not but hear her as she went through the curative agonies.

Bill Honey, who down there was, after all, her physician, insisted on going to her and again

it was just as it had been in the matter of the fight. Hugh Travis had waiting at the tip of his tongue those precisely right, those carefully rehearsed words. He worked just hard enough at persuading Bill that she didn't need him, that she liked to be alone at these times, that having even her husband see her then would cause her shame and humiliation. He explained everything, described the hangover remedy, ingredient by ingredient. He was just persuasive enough to make it inescapable that he had done his best, not so persuasive that he kept the doctor from going to her.

And it worked out just as he had wanted it to work out. There had been a scene. Bill had spoken his mind. He disapproved of the drinking and he disapproved of the remedy. He told her that she was wrecking her digestion if she hadn't already wrecked it. He told her to go on the wagon. He told her not to be an idiot all her life. She told him she hated him. She told him she would never speak to him again. She told him to get out of her house before she had Hugh throw him out.

Bill Honey left and after that the frieze of honeys along the verandah during the long, lazy, drinking afternoons was shorter by one. Everything was ready. The time had finally come for Hugh Travis to make his move. He did it exactly as he had done it the first time, before they had come home. He slashed his thumb with the razor. He rubbed dirt in the cut. He carefully fouled the bandage before he placed it over the wound.

Nothing could have gone better. When he was handing Lucy Liz the first of the day's gin fizzes, she spotted the bandage. Immediately she began her lamentations and reproaches. He had hurt his poor hand again. Why hadn't he listened to her when she had told him not to throw away those pretty baby-blue tablets that were so wonderful? Now he would have to go to that horrible Bill and get some right away. If there were only some other doctor in the neighborhood, she wouldn't mind; but if he had only listened to her, he wouldn't have to be bothering with that horrible Bill now.

Hugh Travis reassured her. It was only a cut. Just because he had had a cut before and it had infected didn't mean that this one would be anything. He was taking the best of care of it and it would heal over in a day or two. It was nothing.

He took the best of care of it and in a day or two it was festering nicely. The day came, as he had known it must. He couldn't handle the hooks on Lucy Liz's girdle and she sent him off to Bill.

"And don't come back without those lovely, baby-blue tab-

lets," she called after him. "Make him give them to you. Don't let him fob you off with anything else."

Bill didn't give him any bichloride of mercury.

"I hear Lucy Liz is drinking as much as ever," Bill said.

"I wish she wouldn't," Hugh sighed.

"But she is?"

"I'm afraid she is."

"Ordinarily I'd tell you to soak that hand in a bichloride of mercury solution but it's just about the most poisonous stuff there is and I don't see how I can let anything that dangerous hang around any house like yours. I hope you aren't going to take offense at this, Hugh, but the way Lucy Liz is most of the time I'd be worried she'd be fumbling around and she'd poison you or herself or both of you with the stuff."

Hugh Travis didn't take offense. He sighed. "Isn't there anything else?" he asked. "Something that isn't that dangerous? I had this happen once before. It was right after we were first married. The doctor up north gave me the stuff, bluish tablets it comes in, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"I kept it locked up all the time I had it in the house and the key was never off me and even then I never drew an easy breath till I was through with using it and I could get rid of the leftover tablets. There must be something else."

"Oh, there is," Bill said reassuringly. "We'll try permanganate of potash. That should do the trick and it is a lot safer."

Hugh Travis came home with the purple crystals and dutifully he soaked his hand in the purple solution. As he had known she would be, Lucy Liz was furious. She was furious with him and she was furious with that horrible old idiot, Bill. She just knew that silly purple stuff wouldn't do the first bit of good. He looked a complete fool piddling his hand around in anything that silly color when he knew all along the baby blue tablets were simply miraculous.

Hugh Travis knew better than his wife could know that the permanganate wasn't going to do any good. He made sure of it. After each of his antiseptic soakings he covered the wound with just the most septic dressing he could manage. Meanwhile he persisted with the permanganate and temporized gently with Lucy Liz. It wasn't till one day when Jack Honey was out at the house that he gave her anything but the soft answer and even then he could not have spoken more gently.

"I'll just have to get along as best I can with this, darling," he said. "That other stuff's poison. It's the most dangerous poison there is, and whatever you think

about it, I really can't argue with Bill because Bill's right. You know as well as I do the way we drink, darling. We're not the kind of people who can allow ourselves to have that corrosive sublimate around. A million different kinds of accidents could happen."

The words fired her to a tantrum of rage. He had known they would. He was taking Bill's side against her. She knew what he was thinking. Bill had never said Hugh Travis drank too much. She would never forget what Bill had said to her.

"It's all right for Hugh to drink as much as he likes. He can handle it, but for you it's crazy. You can't handle it at all."

She tossed down an ultimatum. Either Hugh would go to Bill and get those wonderful, baby-blue tablets or she would go herself and, if she went, he could be mighty sure she would bring them back with her and she would make him use them. She had had enough of this nonsense.

Hugh Travis refused to go. Lucy Liz Travis went. Jack Honey sat with Hugh and juggled half-dollars while she was gone and, when she came home with the tablets, Jack Honey was still there, still juggling. It was important to Hugh Travis that he should be there. It was important that Jack see how Hugh took the tablets away from Lucy Liz, how carefully he handled them, how carefully he counted them, how carefully he prepared the solution, how painstakingly he locked the rest of the tablets away, how carefully he pocketed the key before he even began to soak his hand. He thought of a dozen amusing stories and he put all that he had into telling them because it was important that he keep Jack Honey there all the time he was soaking his hand. Jack Honey had to be there to see him dispose of the used solution. Jack Honey had to be witness to every precaution Hugh Travis took with the lethal stuff. The sheriff saw it all.

He saw it again that afternoon when Hugh took time out from the daily drinking party to soak his hand again. If Hugh Travis had been giving instruction in the safe handling of a deadly poison, he couldn't have made his demonstrations clearer. Finally the party dribbled away to its usual conclusion. Hugh Travis picked his wife up from the floor and carried her up to her bed. The Honeys went their various ways, but Jack Honey had promised to come over in the morning so that he and Hugh Travis could go out shooting again.

"This bichloride is terrific stuff," Hugh Travis assured him. "By morning I'll have the use of my hand again."

Hugh Travis settled Lucy Liz in bed and he went back downstairs. The time had come for him

to make the last of his preparations, to do the last of his rehearsing. He was alone now but that made no difference. He was as careful as he had ever been when performing before an audience. First he mixed up the hangover remedy. He did up a jar full of the fiery concoction. Then he took a water glass and dropped into it one of the bluish tablets. He filled the glass with Travis Hangover Cure and carefully he stirred it. He stirred it long after the tablet had completely dissolved. He was being most careful.

He set the full glass in the refrigerator. What had remained in the glass jar he emptied down the drain of the kitchen sink, running the water a long time to make certain that all of it had flushed away. He wasn't going to need any hangover cure for himself in the morning. It would be better if he didn't look too well. The jar, unwashed, he set in the refrigerator alongside the filled glass. He shut the refrigerator door.

Hugh Travis had almost finished but he was forgetting nothing. He'd had plenty of time to think this thing through. He had worked out every last detail of it. Now he gathered up all the glasses from the afternoon and evening drinking. He washed them and dried them, polishing them to a fine glitter. Then he set them up on the kitchen table. That finished the preparations, but Hugh Travis was a perfectionist. There was that one bit he would have to do the next morning when Jack Honey would be watching him. It was something he had rehearsed and rehearsed, but he was like a virtuoso the day before his great concert. He couldn't rehearse too much.

He took a bichloride tablet out of the vial and deposited it in a dry glass. Taking the glass in his left hand, he flipped it over as though he were tossing the tablet into the sink. Each time, however, he jerked the glass so that the tablet dropped back to the bottom. He did it fifty times and he never missed once. He was so perfect at it that he was even fooling himself. He had to look in the glass each time to assure himself that the tablet was still there. It always was, as he knew it would be. He had been practicing this trick too long to miss on it now, but, even knowing it as he did, he himself had the delusion that he had seen the tablet flip into the sink.

Hugh Travis was satisfied. He returned the tablet to the vial and locked the vial away. Then he put the key in his pocket and he took the glass he had been using for his practice to the sink and washed it most thoroughly. He dried it and polished it and set it with the others on the kitchen table.

Then he went to bed. In the morning he was up early. He

neither shaved nor dressed. He wanted a drink badly and he could have used that fiery restorative which the night before he had run down the drain, but he was a resolute man and bravely he endured the flutterings of his stomach and the pounding ache in his head. He went downstairs and stationed himself with a cigarette at a window from which he could command a good view of the drive. He knew just what he was going to see. Even this minor part of it had been meticulously planned. There was a rise in the road about a quarter of a mile away and from his window he would be able to spot Jack Honey's car when it passed over the rise. The car then would drop down into the hollow and for a matter of minutes it would be out of sight.

Hugh Travis stood at the window with his unlighted cigarette in his hand. Several times while he waited he caught himself as he was fumbling for his lighter. He wanted that cigarette so badly that his hands had begun to tremble, but he waited. It was the smallest of details but it was going to be as right as the rest of it. There would be only the one cigarette, no extra stubs, no accumulation of smoke hanging in the air to indicate that he had been up early and nervously waiting.

He could have gone out of the house to smoke, but he wouldn't allow himself that. If he moved from the window he might just miss the car when it crossed the rise in the road. He knew he could adjust easily to such a small dislocation of timing as might result but this was too important. There was to be not even the most minor of unnecessary adjustments. The plan was complete and it was a good plan. There would be no improvisations.

Finally the car did cross the rise. Hugh Travis lit his cigarette and smoked it in deep, satisfying drags. He carried it with him out to the kitchen. With the cigarette dangling from his lip he took his keys from his pocket and unlocked the cupboard where he had secured the bichloride of mercury. He took out the one tablet. He carried it to the table and dropped it into one of the clean glasses he had left standing there. He ran fresh water into the kettle and set the kettle on the stove. He was just grinding out the butt of his cigarette when he heard Jack Honey come into the house.

He called to him and the big man came out to the kitchen.

"By the time I was up, it was too late to phone you," Hugh Travis said. "This damn hand of mine isn't any better. I'm not good for anything this morning."

Jack Honey, who had his gun slung over his shoulder and was carrying some shotgun shells in

his hand, made the properly sympathetic responses.

"I suppose you wouldn't want to go out alone," Hugh Travis said wistfully.

Jack Honey tossed his shotgun shells from hand to hand. He kept tossing them steadily higher, juggling them, deftly keeping three in the air at once. He let them settle—one—two—and the third—in the palm of his big hand.

"Another day," he said. "Don't worry about it."

Hugh Travis scowled at the tablet in the glass he was holding.

"This stuff," he growled. "I thought it was going to work better than it has."

"Maybe you have to give it more time," Jack Honey said.

It was exactly what Hugh Travis had expected him to say. He wanted to smile but he wouldn't let himself smile. He smiled somewhere inside himself. These people were so stupid, so predictable. A clever fellow like himself could read them all the way down the line, right to the very end of his timetable.

Hugh Travis turned petulantly to the stove and turned off the flame he had set to burning under the kettle.

"The hell with it," he said. "I'll soak it some later, maybe. Let's have a drink." He flipped the glass and tossed the tablet into the sink. Then setting the empty glass among the others on the table he ran the water in the sink and flushed the tablet down the drain.

Jack Honey watched him. Taking up a couple of other glasses from the table, Hugh Travis mixed their drinks. Jack Honey had returned to juggling his shotgun shells. Hugh Travis set the drinks on the tray and then he filled the tray with the mixings for future rounds. Jack Honey pocketed his shotgun shells and carried the tray out to the verandah. It was heavily laden and it required two hands. Hugh Travis had only the one hand available.

They sat through the morning and drank and talked. Periodically Hugh Travis would suggest that there was no reason why Jack Honey shouldn't have his shooting just because Travis happened to be a cripple, but the suggestion was invariably made so wistfully and so much without conviction that even a duller man than Jack Honey could not have failed to realize that his host was lonely and bored and out of sorts. Hugh Travis was doing the polite thing, but he didn't want to be left alone. He wanted company.

Jack Honey said they could have their shooting another time. He took another drink and went on sitting up with his sick friend. The morning wore on toward noon and they heard Lucy Liz

come downstairs. Their talk died away and Jack Honey was juggling his shotgun shells again. He was extraordinarily good at it. He never missed once. Then they heard Lucy Liz in the kitchen. It was that agonized retching again.

Hugh Travis sighed and took another sip of his drink. Jack Honey put his shotgun shells away and squirmed in his chair. Neither moved to go to her. They had been through all that before and they were both gentlemen. She would join them when she was ready. After a while the dreadful noises stopped and the house went completely silent. Jack Honey and Hugh Travis talked again. Almost an hour passed and Lucy Liz hadn't come out to the verandah for the first of her gin fizzes. She was way past her schedule. Jack Honey glanced at his watch. Hugh Travis took that as his signal. He went to the tray and mixed a gin fizz.

"Let's take this inside to Lucy Liz," he said. "She'll be wanting it."

They went into the house. Hugh Travis was carrying the drink. When they came into the kitchen, he let the glass fall from his hand. It shattered on the kitchen floor and he ran to Lucy Liz. She was lying by the sink. In the sink stood the empty glass that had held the hangover cure. The walls of the glass were stained with the drying tomato juice.

Lucy Liz was dead. Her face was twisted in a grimace of agony and her lips were dry and blackened.

"No," Hugh Travis moaned. "No. It can't be. She got the bichloride."

"You're crazy, man," Jack Honey told him. "How could she get it? You keep it locked away."

Hugh Travis felt in his pocket for the keys. He brought them out. He went to the cabinet and unlocked it. He brought out the tablets and counted them. There had been ten originally. He had used them four times the day before and that would have left six. He had taken one out that morning and he hadn't used it. He had washed it down the sink.

"That's right, man," Jack Honey said. "You threw it in the sink and washed it down. I saw you do it."

"That leaves five and there are five here."

"You're sure you used four yesterday?"

"I know I did."

"Could she have kept one from that time you were using them before?"

"Why would she? She was happy. You know she was happy and anyhow I kept them locked up and counted them then, too. When I threw the leftover ones away there was none missing."

Hugh Travis went to the refrigerator and opened it. The jar

in which he had mixed the hangover cure was still there as he had left it, unwashed. He took it out and looked at it.

"Better leave that alone," Jack Honey said. "I'll have to have it analyzed."

"Analyzed? What for?"

"The poison."

"But I drank half of it and left her the rest. Jack, tell me. I'm going crazy. How could this happen?"

"I don't know, man. I just don't know."

Hugh Travis turned and looked hard at the glasses on the kitchen table. Slowly he shut his eyes.

"Jack," he groaned. "I did it. I killed her. I know how I did it. There could be no other way."

"Man, you're crazy."

"No. I'm not crazy. I know. You thought I flipped that damn tablet into the sink and I thought so, too. But I didn't. I thought I had but it didn't go out. It just bounced against the side of the glass and dropped back in."

"I saw it in the sink. I saw you wash it down the drain." There was just the touch of hesitation in the way the words were spoken.

Hugh Travis had been listening for that little uncertainty. He caught it and stepped in with his clincher.

"You thought you saw it and so did I," he insisted. "Look," he said.

He took one of the remaining tablets and dropped it into one of the remaining glasses on the table. He picked up the glass and flipped it. It was the trick he had rehearsed so carefully. He had it down perfectly. The gesture was not visibly different from the one he had used in disposing of the tablet but this time the tablet did remain in the glass. Hugh Travis ran the water in the sink and set the glass among the others on the table. He beckoned Jack Honey to the table and, standing side by side, they looked at the glasses.

"That's what happened," Hugh Travis said. "I thought I was being as careful as a man can be but I wasn't. She came in here and took a glass from the table." He picked up the glass and showed Jack Honey that the tablet was still in it. "That's the way the luck would be," he said. "She would blunder on the one glass out of the lot, the one we both thought I'd emptied. She would pour that damn pickmeup in that one. Of course, it burned going down but it always burned —all that red pepper. She wouldn't know it was any different. She couldn't know any more than we knew when we heard her in here. I killed her, Jack. Right here with you watching me do it, I killed my Lucy Liz."

Just as he was speaking her name, Jack Honey dropped him.

The heavy fist wrapped around a shotgun shell caught Hugh Travis just behind the ear and brought him down like a stockyards calf. The water was still running in the sink.

Jack Honey filled a glass with it and dashed it in Hugh Travis' face. Hugh Travis started to rise. Jack Honey caught him on the chin with the heel of his boot and he went down again.

"You're smart," Jack Honey said. "Man, you're smart. You're too smart for me. You had me fooled all the way but you had to go on being smart until you were too smart for yourself. You had to ram it home. You had to show me how it could be you thought you flipped the stuff out of the glass when you really didn't. I guess that was going to be your clincher, man, but happens I know about that. I know all about that. That juggling I do. I'm good at it. I never miss. Not once. But I used to miss a lot. You do a thing like that a long time, you get so you can do it and never miss. You were just showing me how it could happen, but, man, you were too good at it. The stuff stayed in the glass the very first shot. You couldn't do that without you been practicing it. You should've let it go without showing me. That was too smart."

He dropped to one knee beside Hugh Travis. He told Hugh Travis he was all right. Jack Honey knew, but what he knew wasn't enough for any jury.

"You're all right now, man," Jack Honey said, "but you won't be when I'm through with you. I'll get it out of you, everything I'll need for that old jury."

And then for the first time, big, lumbering, slow-thinking Jack Honey began showing his cleverness. His was not like the supple wits of Hugh Travis. His was in his hands instead of in his head. He went to work on Hugh Travis with his clever hands and bit by bit, pain by pain, those hands completed the outsmarting of Hugh Travis. Jack Honey had out of him everything he needed to know.

adventure of the little hangman

by . . . August Derleth

There in a pool of light lay the body of Kingsley Pollitt. His open shirt showing marks of the rope that'd hung him.

"MY NATURE abhors a vacuum," said Solar Pons that evening, as he stepped into our room at the inn in Ilfracombe, "and such a holiday as this is indeed nothing less. Happily, unless I am very much mistaken, we shall soon find ourselves once again taking up one of those little problems in human behavior which never cease to enlist my deepest interest."

"Why do you say so?" I asked, for we had come to Ilfracombe at my insistence to walk some of the most charming coast paths in all England, because Pons' recent activity in the puzzles of the Lost Metternich and the Hats of M. Dulac had seemed to me to tire him unduly.

Pons chuckled. "I fear I may disappoint you, Parker. I have no great feat of deduction to offer. Only a moment ago, as I came in, I saw a constable get off his cycle just outside. Perhaps it was only vanity which suggested to me that it was more than mere coincidence that a constable in some haste should be alighting at these quarters just when we are in residence."

Solar Pons first appeared in 1929 and was originally created to fill that "abhorrent vacuum in the life of London" that followed Sherlock Holmes' retirement. The author of the by now internationally famous pastiches is equally well known for his work in the Fantasy field.

He cocked his head and added, "But I think not." Then, as a knock fell upon the door, he called out cheerily, "Come in, Constable, come in! Pray don't stand on ceremony."

The door opened smartly. An apple-cheeked young constable did indeed stand with almost military stiffness on our threshold.

"Mr. Solar Pons," he said. "Constable Ronald Borrow, Combe Martin."

Pons rubbed his hands together in pleasure, his eyes merry. "Pray come in and sit down, Constable Borrow! A delightfully suggestive name. I am fond of George Borrow; no one has ever written more effectively of wild Wales." He smiled. "But you have not come to discuss literature, I take it."

"No, Mr. Pons—there's been a murder."

"Ah, Constable, you have no idea of how sweetly your words fall upon my ear, after three days spent with the beauties of the North Devon coast. Let us hear about it."

"I telephoned to Scotland Yard, sir. Inspector Jamison told me you were here. So I came directly in the hope that you might lend us a hand. The murdered man is Kingsley Pollitt."

Pons' eyes sparkled. "The murderer of Helen Blayre! Released last month by order of the Home Secretary on a legal technicality grown from some question about the trial proceedings. 'Miscarriage of justice,' he called it. Served ten years, I believe."

"Yes, sir. But there was no miscarriage of justice, Mr. Pons. He did her in, no doubt about that. A brute of a man—hot-tempered, too. He came to Combe Martin, back to his half-brother's house. John told us at noon today that he had not been in last night, but no one was anxious about him. I suppose most of the people in Combe Martin just hoped he'd go away and not come back—he made them uneasy. You can understand that, sir. Well, sir, we didn't organize a search—no reason to do so. Along about sundown tonight, two boys found him. He was lying well up one of the headlands along the coast. You may know it—we call it the Little Hangman. It rises against the Great Hangman, next the sea. Mr. Pons, he was hanged!"

"Found guilty, condemned to death, reprieved, freed—and finally hanged anyway," murmured Pons. "John, I take it, is the half-brother? He had no objection to Kingsley's return to live with him?"

"I asked him that, Mr. Pons—just after Kingsley came back. He said Kingsley had no one else to go to; he could not close his door to him. Besides, John

Pollitt is a bookish sort of man —he doesn't go out much, and I'd guess Kingsley's being there wouldn't make much difference to him as long as there was no active interference. But we ought not to take time talking here, Mr. Pons. The body's been left just as it was found. I thought you might like to look at the ground." A little self-consciously, he added, "I'm somewhat familiar with your methods, sir."

"My chronicler," said Pons, with a glance in my direction, "has done his best to glorify my little exploits, which are nothing more than the proper use of a well developed faculty of observation coupled with common sense deduction—mere exercises in logic, Constable. Very well, lead on. We'll find a conveyance somewhere in Ilfracombe, no doubt, and you can pack your cycle alongside."

I made but the semblance of a protest, reminding Pons that he had, after all, come for a holiday.

"The game's afoot, Parker," he replied, "and infinitely preferable to any holiday. Come along!"

On the way to Combe Martin, Pons prodded the constable to refresh his memory of the murder of Helen Blayre.

"I wasn't with the police then, Mr. Pons," said Constable Borrow. "But I remember it very well. Helen Blayre was an orphan, the ward of her uncle, Tom Plomer. Tom raised her brother Ned, too. She was a pretty sort of a girl, not exactly what you'd call beautiful, sir, but not plain, either. Very lively, she was. Why, she was up and about the Little Hangman like a bird, and she knew the coast paths like anything. She was always to be found out there, with a book or a sheet of drawing paper or both. She was great friends with the Pollitts.

"I think, as a matter of fact, there was a distant relationship by marriage. John never went out too much, even as a younger man, but Helen was about with Kingsley here and there. It was understood they were going to be married—then there was that letter she wrote Kingsley, turning him down. He lost his head and strangled her in a fury. Hadn't meant to do it, but the brute didn't know his own strength. He was just in a rage and took it out on her—blind, you might say. But he was always a selfish man, and thought nought of anybody other."

"As I recall it, that murder took place outside, too, didn't it?"

"On the Little Hangman, yes, sir. Kingsley came on her there after she sent him the letter. They had words. He lost his temper. One thing led to another and he killed her. He ran for it, but

not far. We found him drunk at the pub."

"Had she returned his ring?" asked Pons reflectively.

"Oh, it wasn't like that, Mr. Pons. These are simple people. There wasn't any ring, sir. Nothing like that. It was just something you understood. She walked out with Kingsley and she wasn't seen walking out with anybody else. She was his girl, as you might say."

"One would have thought Pollitt would have gone anywhere but Combe Martin, after Dartmoor."

"Yes, indeed. But no, back here he came. Surly and moody, as always."

"The girl's uncle and brother? What of them?" asked Pons.

"Both still alive, Mr. Pons. Tom's about sixty now, Ned's close to forty." In the light from a passing car, the constable looked troubled, as if he anticipated an unpleasant task. "We'll have to talk to 'em, I have no doubt."

"All in good time, Constable."

In but a little while—for the distance was scarcely half a dozen miles—we had reached Combe Martin and were on our way along the path that led to the slope of the Little Hangman, which rose up for over seven hundred feet east of the village. A waxing moon lay low in the west, and over against the eastern sky, towering higher than our destination, loomed the Great Hangman, dark on heaven. Constable Borrow's lantern lit the path, and Pons strode along with far more vigor than he had shown during our casual holiday hikes along the coast from Ilfracombe, his Inverness spreading almost batlike in the light wind which blew from the direction of Bristol Channel.

Part way up the slope, another constable stood with a lantern, on guard lest unauthorized persons pass by. A third stood virtually on the crown of the height, his lantern shining like an intimate star, toward which we toiled up the gradual slope away from the last houses and fields of the combe. As we came toward our goal, the constable on duty there turned his light earthward.

There in a pool of light lay the body of Kingsley Pollitt. The dead man lay on his back, arms flung wide, his sightless eyes turned toward the stars. He was once, clearly, a thick-set, powerful man, of medium height to shortness of stature, but he had lost much of his onetime weight and his clothing fitted him poorly. He was fully clothed, except for a tie; his open shirt revealed the mark of the rope which had hanged him. At least two days' growth of beard was visible, even against the discoloration of his face, which I knew was a deep blue, though in this artificial light it looked sickeningly gray,

so that Pollitt had the appearance of a foreigner.

The tableau held but a moment. Then Pons reached for Constable Borrow's lantern.

"If you please, Constable. Thank you."

He swept the light around in a wide circle, and up and down the slope.

"A singular lack," he murmured. "From what was he hanged? There is no tree within the glow of the light."

"No, Mr. Pons. We observed that. We can only conjecture that he was hanged elsewhere."

"And brought here. Then there would be signs."

He began to search the ground, earnestly. He threw off his Inverness and got down upon his knees, moving around the body in steadily widening circles for a while, then crawling back down the way we had come. He went for some distance down the slope before he came to his feet and returned to where we waited.

"Something has been dragged toward this spot," he said, "and I submit it could not have been other than the body. There are barrow marks further down, some fresh, some older. Perhaps Combe Martin's reputation as a once wealthy town because of extensive silver and lead mining in the vicinity quite possibly spurs occasional native efforts toward the discovery of metal forgotten over the centuries, eh, Constable?"

"It might happen, Mr. Pons, though I'd consider it unlikely."

"So then, if Pollitt were hanged elsewhere, there is not only premeditation but also some special significance in his body's being brought to the Little Hangman."

"Mr. Pons, his crime . . ."

"Precisely. He murdered in the sight of heaven; so let him die there. But we have no evidence that he did die here, only that he was brought here. Have a look at him, will you, Parker?"

I examined the dead man as well as I could by the combined light of the two lanterns. Everything I saw was consistent with death by hanging. There was, however, a contusion on the back of his head, to which I called Pons' attention.

"Could it have been made in the course of transporting his body to this place?" asked Pons.

"It was made before death."

Pons smiled. "Stunned, then hanged. Most interesting. The goal was hanging, not death by any other means, for the man who stunned him could have dispatched him in any way he chose. He elected this imaginative if cumbersome method, as if to carry out the justice Pollitt escaped. Ah, what have we here?"

As he spoke, he darted forward, seized hold of what ap-

peared to be a smooth twig projecting from beneath the body, and pulled it forth. From his fingers dangled a carved miniature gibbet.

"This little problem grows more fascinating with each moment," said Pons. "What do you make of this, Constable?"

Constable Borrow's face was lugubrious. "I'm afraid, Mr. Pons, that it puts yet another light on the matter."

"We are meant to believe, plainly, that Pollitt got what was coming to him. The motive for his death would appear to be vengeance—or simply justice, in the mind of his murderer."

"There's more than that, Mr. Pons," said the constable. "You may remember Mr. Hernshaw, the executioner?"

"That short, cherubic little man who was so disappointed at not being able to hang Pollitt!"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. He was unwise enough to say so for the newspapers, and he was retired soon afterward. You see, Mr. Pons, Mr. Hernshaw, too, is from the vicinity. He now lives in Combe Martin, where he does a little business, I am bound to say, selling wood carvings."

Pons could not repress a chuckle. "A travesty, Constable, a travesty! A hill and a man—we now have two little hangmen and a hanged man. And three named men among probably a score or more who would not be sorry to see Kingsley Pollitt dead, and might have helped him shuffle off this mortal coil."

He turned the full light of the lantern upon the carving in his hand. It was done with broad, powerful strokes of the knife. It had a certain malignancy, a powerful suggestiveness, as no doubt it was intended to have. It was carved out of some soft wood, the identity of which was not immediately apparent.

"A professional wood carver, our Mr. Hernshaw?" murmured Pons. "But this is not the work of a professional on the face of it."

"Unless it was meant to look unlike the work of one," I offered.

Pons agreed. "That is a point I fear we dare not overlook." He handed the carving to Constable Borrow. "Now, then," he went on crisply, "I take it you examined Pollitt's pockets?"

"Yes, Mr. Pons. There was nothing of significance. Some matches, four shillings, six pence, a pack of cigarettes, and a newspaper clipping on which he had marked two prospective jobs. It would appear that he had intended to find a job in Bristol, for both were offered there."

Pons stood for a moment looking thoughtfully down at the body. Then he turned away.

"I daresay we have finished here," he said.

"Will you stay the night in

Combe Martin, Mr. Pons?" asked Borrow.

"I think not. Let us just have a look at the items found in his pocket—and, if possible, a glance at the dossier on Helen Blayre's murder. Then we'll return to Ilfracombe and come back here in the morning."

Though the hour was close to midnight when we reached our quarters in Ilfracombe, Pons was far from ready for bed. He had brought with him from Combe Martin the newspaper clipping found in Pollitt's pocket, and a photostat of the letter Helen Blayre had written Pollitt shortly before he had strangled her. He sat for some time beside the lamp, studying both of these things, his keen gray eyes veiled, his lean, hawk-like face deep in thought.

The clipping from a Bristol paper could not be construed otherwise than it was. It was barely large enough to contain the four advertisements among which Pollitt had marked two, with the numerals "1" and "2," suggesting the order in which he meant to apply for a job. The first notice that he had marked called for construction workers, and the second offered a job in an ironmonger's shop.

I protested at his long scrutiny. "It's plain to be seen that there's nothing but what meets the eye in that."

"I fancy you are right, Parker," he agreed amiably. "Yet I find a trifle of significance about it. It suggests nothing to you?"

"No, except that Pollitt meant to leave Combe Martin."

"Precisely. For a month nothing happened to him in Combe Martin. Then, just as he was about to put himself quite possibly beyond his murderer's reach by going to Bristol, he was slain. I submit this suggests that his murderer had planned to kill him from the time of his first appearance in Combe Martin, and was only biding his time. Pollitt's intention to leave forced him to action." He dropped the clipping and turned to the photostat. "What do you make of this?"

The letter poor Helen Blayre had written was simplicity itself.

Dear Kingsley,

I know I can never marry you, and it would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. The way of life you offer me is not the same as the one we have planned. You were good to ask me, but, I am sorry, it cannot be. I wanted to write you this to spare us both next time we meet, so that there wouldn't be any misunderstanding. We have always got along so well, I would not want this to spoil that. Let us just forget that you ever spoke to me and go on as always.

In affectionate friendship

—Helen.

"That is plain as a pikestaff," I said.

"I am glad to hear you say so," retorted Pons. "There are one or two little points about it that intrigue me, however. It does not seem to you curiously worded?"

"Oh, come, Pons," I cried, "it is nothing more than what it is meant to be. It tells us that Pollitt proposed a way of life which did not appeal to her as the ideal marriage; so she rejected him. The letter is absolutely straightforward, but I suppose it would hurt the vanity of a low type of human being like Pollitt. Obviously, they had planned something other than what he now suggested, and she could not agree with the change he proposed to make in their plans."

"It is always refreshing to listen to you, Parker. You have a reliable faculty for reducing matters to their simplest common denominator."

"What can you find in that innocuous letter in conflict with what I have said?" I challenged him.

"I submit there are various openings. For instance, Miss Blayre wrote: 'it would be dishonest to pretend' that she could marry Kingsley. But, if we are to believe Constable Borrow, did she not do so for some time before she wrote this letter? Secondly, what is this 'way of life' that is now so different from the 'one we have planned'? Note, please, she writes 'have,' not 'had.' A minor point, true, but I cannot help calling it to your attention. Next, she proposes that both of them 'just forget' that Kingsley asked her to marry him, and 'go on as always.' Now, then, how did they 'go on' before? I find that question provocative."

"Ah, Pons, you are so given to finding hidden meanings in everything that simplicity confounds you."

Pons chuckled delightedly. "On the contrary, I agree wholeheartedly with you, Parker. This is a simple, straightforward missive. I am always astounded to discover how the simplest communications can be misunderstood and misinterpreted. Is that not, perhaps, symptomatic of some basic flaw in mankind. Semantic confusion abounds in this world." He put the letter down and turned out the lamp. "Let us sleep on it. We may have a clearer view in the morning."

Pons routed me out at dawn and, after a hasty breakfast, insisted upon walking to Combe Martin. Thus it was almost two hours after dawn when we reached the village. There, Pons went immediately to the little police station and returned the effects he had studied the previous night. There, too, he found Constable Borrow, with whom we set out to call on John

Pollitt, for Pons had expressed a wish to look at the rooms the victim had occupied.

Combe Martin by daylight seemed somewhat drab, but it was hardly uninteresting. It lay in a long cluster of houses, many of them very old, which ran for over a mile along the combe to the beach. At one time it had been a wealthy town, as a result of the silver and lead which had been mined there, but the height of the mining was more than a century in the past, and what had once been grandeur had now faded. Though the surrounding country was beautiful enough, only a few objects of interest remained in the village to tempt the traveler, such as the eight-chimneyed Pack of Cards Inn, built on a cruciform plan, and the Standing Stone on Knap Down, northeast of the village. Its chief architectural beauty, however, was the church of St. Peter ad Vincula, which stood proudly with its hundred-foot high west tower, flying buttresses, battlements, two tiers of gargoyles, and crocketed pinnacles, which Pons admired as we went by.

The Pollitt house stood on the edge of the village, near the beach. It was very old, a white-walled building with an ancient roof. Like so many Combe Martin houses, it was of three floors, and its ground floor was partly sunk into the earth. And John Pollitt, for all that he resembled a fading professor in a girls' school, had the undeniable appearance of belonging to the house.

He was a genteel, soft-voiced fellow, wearing a thin beard. His rooms were crowded with books of all descriptions; books occupied not only the tall shelves but were scattered on chairs, tables, and even the floor. His pale blue eyes looked out apologetically from behind his spectacles, studying Pons with polite interest as Constable Borrow introduced him.

"Mr. Pons wants to ask a few questions, Mr. Pollitt," said the constable. "Just the usual inquiry."

"Of course. I understand thoroughly."

Pons lost no time. "How soon after he was set free did your half-brother come here to live, Mr. Pollitt?"

"I believe he came straight here."

"You interposed no objection?"

Pollitt hesitated slightly. "He had nowhere else to go, sir," he said then. "After all, I am his brother. I could not turn him out."

"You knew how people felt about him?"

"Yes, I knew. Still—" he shrugged "—there is enough of man's inhumanity to man without my adding my bit."

"He never showed any fear of his fellow townsmen?"

"None, sir. He was a strong man, and prison had not improved his temper."

"I should like to take a look at his quarters, if I may."

"Certainly, Mr. Pons. Come this way."

Pollitt descended to the ground floor and into one large room, beautiful with the age of its whitewashed walls and raftered ceiling.

"Nothing has been disturbed here. It is just as he left it," said Pollitt.

Pons stood for a few moments in the middle of the room, looking at the cot which had served Kingsley Pollitt as his last bed; at the table where presumably, he took his meals; at the two chairs, which were certainly a century old, and the product of someone's unskilled hand.

"How old is this building, Mr. Pollitt?" asked Pons abruptly.

"I believe it dates to the time of Edward I."

"It is surely well preserved. Are those the original beams?"

"Yes, sir."

Pons pulled up a chair and mounted it to scrutinize the rafters. "Remarkable," he murmured. "How this wood endures! But the room is not at all damp."

"No, sir. The walls are very thick. At least a foot, Mr. Pons. We keep it dry."

" 'We'?"

"Forgive me. I do not customarily live alone. I have a handyman who lives with me—George Potter—but I had to let him go because he can't—couldn't—abide Kingsley. I suppose now he'll be back."

Pons turned back to the beams. After he had looked at several of them, he gave his attention to the remainder of the room, scrutinizing the floor with exceptional care on his hands and knees. But there was singularly little to see. The room was in good order—doubtless Kingsley Pollitt had learned how to keep his quarters in prison. One chair stood at an angle a little away from the table, as if it had been pushed back in haste and not replaced when Kingsley got up.

"Tell me, Mr. Pollitt, had your brother an intimation that someone might bear him a murderous grudge?" asked Pons, getting up from his knees.

"He told me one night he had had a warning to leave Combe Martin. It was unsigned. He destroyed it, but felt it had come from one of Helen's relatives."

"It came by post?"

"No, it was pushed into his hand when he walked out of one of the local pubs."

"One of Miss Blayre's relatives, eh? He did not mention which one?"

"No, Mr. Pons."

"Very well. I shall want to talk

with them. Thank you, Mr. Pollitt."

Outside, Pons stood briefly looking toward the headlands. In the morning sunlight the Great and Little Hangmen looked anything but sinister, the former somewhat formidable, but the latter only a pleasant upland slope rising to a rounded ridge, higher back from the coast, the peak ridge dominating the lower ridge. The headlands stood like barriers to the sea, which added a salty tang to the morning air.

Constable Borrow waited silently until Pons turned away. Then he set out in a rapid trot back the way we had come, out the inland edge of Combe Martin to a modest country house which stood before an extensive farm, and was separated from the road by a high hedge.

"They'll both be here," explained Borrow. "You can talk to both at once, or to each separate, as you wish."

"It makes no difference," said Pons.

As it happened, the older man, Tom Plomer, responded to Borrow's pull at the bell. He was a dour, grim-faced man, bald except for a fringe of graying hair around his head just above his ears. He was clean-shaven. Sharp black eyes darted from one to another of us before he spoke.

"Mr. Borrow," he said in a flat, and, I thought, wary, voice. Then, instead of inviting us in, he stepped outside. "Ye've come, I'll be bound, about Kingsley Pollitt."

"We have, Mr. Plomer. This is Mr. Solar Pons, who is making some inquiries for the police."

Plomer nodded curtly. "If ye expect to know where I was night before last, I'll tell ye now, I was abroad."

"Witnesses, Mr. Plomer?" asked Borrow.

"I believe they can be found," answered the older man gravely.

"Mr. Plomer," said Pons, "had you seen or spoken to Kingsley Pollitt between the time he came home and the night he met his death?"

"I saw him, yes," said Plomer grimly. "As for speaking to him, I'd as like speak to the devil. Ye needn't be asking me any more questions. I'll tell ye now I won't lift a finger to harm the man who did him in. He had it coming—and more. If I'd a got my hands on him . . ."

He was quiet abruptly, as a younger man came hurrying around the corner of the house, his hot, brown eyes angry, his dark-skinned face flushed with irritation.

"Here, here, what's all this?" he cried. Then, catching sight of the constable, he added in a calmer tone, "Oh, it's you, Borrow."

"Don't say anything, Ted," cautioned Plomer.

"I've got nothing to hide," answered Ted Blayre.

"And where were you night before last?" asked Borrow.

"Out with a lady. And don't be asking me to name her, for I'll not drag her into this. I know what you're aiming at, Borrow, but it won't wash. I came face to face but the once with Kingsley Pollitt . . ."

"At a pub, Mr. Blayre?" asked Pons quietly.

"Yes, it was there—as he was coming out and I was going in. Had he not been coming out, I'd not have gone in. It wouldn't do for the likes of both of us to be together in peace under one roof. If ever a man deserved to die, it was Kingsley Pollitt. And I'm hoping you never find out who did it, for the whole village is glad he's done for, the whole village—not a soul in it but didn't love Helen—nor hate him for what he did."

"Ye talk too much," warned the older man sharply.

"I know what I'm about," answered Blayre curtly. "There's not a man in all Combe Martin who'd give testimony to say he saw anyone wheeling a body in a barrow, and if he saw it plain as day, knowing it was Kingsley Pollitt's."

"No one has said a barrow was used, Mr. Blayre," said Pons.

"True. But it takes only a small bit of brain to see that. If it's true, as they say, he was hanged where there was no tree, then it's by barrow he'd have been wheeled up the hill. It don't take Mr. Solar Pons down from London to figure that out."

"Quite so. Elementary," agreed Pons pleasantly. "Perhaps you'll be good enough to tell us how you got that mud on your shoes. It seems unlike these surroundings, and not at all unlike that to be found on the path up the Little Hangman."

Blayre looked down quickly, a fleeting expression of alarm in his eyes. Then he glanced up again, defiantly. "There's mud of that sort all about Combe Martin," he said scornfully.

"Why don't ye go back to Lunnon?" cried Plomer angrily. "We don't need no meddling busybody coming down here to pry about."

"Easy now, Mr. Plomer," said Borrow. "Mr. Pons is here at our request. We can ask you down to the station and put you through it, proper. We'll have the answer to some questions—straight now, if you please." He turned to Pons. "Go right ahead, Mr. Pons."

"There's just a trifling matter I want to inquire about," said Pons. "I'll have a look at your barrow."

Without a flicker of emotion, Ted Blayre turned and led the way across the yard and around the house to a small shed. He threw open the door. There stood the barrow, freshly washed, as clean as new.

"Commendably tidy," said Pons dryly.

"We like to keep things clean," said Blayre.

"Now, then—what else?" asked Plomer defiantly.

"Nothing else, Gentlemen," said Pons. "I bid you good-day."

As we walked away from the Plomer house, Borrow said apologetically, "Just you say the word, Mr. Pons, and we'll have them down to the station—one at a time—and we'll fair put them through it."

"No, no, Constable—I learned all I expected to learn," answered Pons enigmatically.

"Either one could have killed him," I said. "But I'll take her brother before her uncle."

"If they meant to kill him, why wait a month?" asked Pons.

"Opportunity," I said.

"A fortuitous opportunity indeed, on the eve of his departure for Bristol." He smiled. "However, let us not neglect Mr. Hernshaw. I have a fancy to speak with him."

The retired executioner likewise lived on the edge of the village, in an old two-storey stone house. We found him outside among his bees, a rotund, pink-cheeked little man. At sight of us, he came hastening eagerly forward, taking off his bee-veil, a broad smile on his face, his bird-like eyes fixed on Pons.

"It's a real pleasure to meet Mr. Solar Pons," he said without preamble. "I knew you, sir, the moment I caught sight of you. I used to read and hear about you while I lived in London. I never thought I'd have the opportunity to meet you. Especially in these circumstances"—here he favored us with an elfin smile—"when it may seem impossible to find a solution to this crime—if it can be called that. Now, then, what can I do for you?"

"I understand you carve in wood, Mr. Hernshaw?" said Pons.

"I do, indeed, sir. I do. May I offer you a carving?"

"Let me purchase something of my choice. Do you have a gibbet in wood, by any chance?"

"Quite in my line, as you may say, sir. Of course."

"I'll take one, then, presently. Similar to that found near Kingsley Pollitt's body."

Not an eyelash quivered at this remark of Pons'. "Whatever you like, Mr. Pons," said Hernshaw, again with that smile, which was now not so much elfin as sly, as if he were laughing at us but did not dare do so openly.

"I seem to recall, Mr. Hernshaw," Pons continued, "that your unwise comment about Kingsley Pollitt cost you your position."

"It certainly contributed to it." Hernshaw nodded, still smiling engagingly. "I would dearly have loved to hang him, Mr. Pons. Not alone that he

merited it, but he had a thick neck—a bull neck, I believe it is called in some quarters. He represented a challenge to a man of my skill, sir, a genuine challenge. I was very disappointed when the reprieve came through. Very disappointed. I fair cried, I did. And I spoke my piece—and that was what started the trouble for me. I found it best to resign in the face of all the to-do brought about by those tender-hearted idiots who are so soft on capital punishment. Why, Mr. Pons, there was a time I'd as soon have hanged a sociologist as a murderer, I was that put out." He looked at us all archly, and laughed.

"You saw Pollitt since he came back?"

"Quite often. They'll tell you —that is, if you'll find anyone to testify," he added, with a satisfied conviction that we would not, "that I followed him about—keeping my distance, of course, for he was mortal strong—more than once. I used to speculate how I'd have done it—though his neck'd shrunk some in Dartmoor. All of him had."

The smile never left his face, and he looked from one to another of us as if expecting open approbation.

"It's the sort of thing that gets into your blood, Mr. Pons, and that's a fact. You take pride in a good job well done. And in all the years I served in my capacity, I never bungled an execution. Nice, clean jobs. That's as it should be. They have a right to expect it."

"Like Kingsley Pollitt," I put in.

"Ah, was he now? I've not seen the body. But I'm happy to hear it." He gazed at me intently. "You'll be Dr. Parker, won't you? Then you must have seen the body. Tell me, was his neck broken cleanly?— Ah, I see by the expression on your face that he was more likely strangled. Not a good drop, then." He clucked in disapproval and shook his head with an expression of prim distaste.

I thought it an extraordinary conversation, and ventured a glance at Pons. I saw that his eyes positively danced with pleasure, and that he had difficulty keeping a smile from his thin lips.

"Bad as he was, Pollitt deserved a clean hanging," added Hernshaw soberly.

"Since you followed him about, perhaps you can tell us how he spent his time?" asked Pons.

"As he usually did, Mr. Pons —off by himself on solitary walks, or half drunk in the pubs. There was no work he could do. His brother sometimes found an odd job for him, but it was never for very long, nor meant to be. No one wanted him. Helen Blayre stood between him and whatever he tried to do. We're a closely-knit community, sir.

We've been here for hundreds of years. We've no tolerance of murderers. It was strange he came back here—but then, he was always hardened to what others thought of him."

"Was there anyone who liked him?" asked Pons gently.

"Helen Blayre did," said Hernshaw. "And his brother. He never gave another the chance to like him. Always a surly fellow. But you don't need me to tell you that. Ask anyone—anyone at all."

"Did you see him the night he was killed, Mr. Hernshaw?"

"No, Mr. Pons, I did not. Strange, too, for I was abroad that night—until quite late. You might even find my footprints on the path up the Little Hangman near to where he was found. It's a pity no one hereabouts has the knack with his hands I have—that carving you say you found would be crude compared to my work." He smiled again, that same sly, if winning, smile. "But come with me—I'll show you my work."

After half an hour of looking at Hernshaw's skilled carvings, we took our leave, Pons with a beautifully done gibbet in his pocket. There was no resemblance whatsoever between this piece and that other found under Kingsley Pollitt's body, and I said so as soon as we were out of earshot.

Pons chuckled. "That means only that this one could not have been done by someone else, but that the other might have been done by Hernshaw. A good carver can carve crudely, if he's a mind to, but a bad one cannot carve well, no matter how much he desires to do so," he retorted.

"A sly, devious man," I said. "Sinister, too."

"Oh, say not so," answered Pons. "I found him delightful, with a flavor seldom encountered in our cities. Country people seem to remain individualists longer than those unhappy souls confined in closer quarters."

"I'm afraid we've not had much help," said Borrow, disappointed.

"Do not be disheartened, Constable. I did not really expect to be assisted very much. As a matter of fact, I was reasonably sure of the identity of the murderer before I went to sleep last night."

"Mr. Pons, you are having me!" protested Constable Borrow.

"Thanks to your own assistance, Constable," continued Pons. "I daresay there is a problem to be faced when it comes to trial, for the temper of the town is such that no one will want to testify, though there must have been someone who saw the barrow with its burden being wheeled up the Little Hangman, no matter how late the hour might have been. By the way, I

should lose no time impounding Plomer's barrow and subjecting it to the most careful scientific examination. I should not be surprised to learn that it had been used to transport the body—just as I am reasonably sure that it was Mr. Hernshaw who pushed that little wooden gibbet beneath the body."

"I am gratified if I was of any assistance, Mr. Pons—but I don't understand how."

"Come along, Constable," said Pons. "We'll go to the station where we left the evidence."

Constable Borrow flashed me a mystified glance, but I could only shrug, knowing my companion's unorthodox methods.

At the small police station, Pons asked once again for the photostat of Helen Blayre's letter.

"Read it, Mr. Borrow," he directed.

Borrow did so. His eyes, when he raised them, were unenlightened.

"It suggests nothing to you?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Pons. "Yet it is perfectly clear. Consider the second sentence, for example. 'The way of life you offer me is not the same as the one we have planned.' What does it mean to you?"

"Kingsley Pollitt made some change in their plans."

"I submit, Mr. Borrow, that your conclusion is as much in error as the conclusion of those who read this letter before you. Pray note, she writes 'we *have* planned'—not 'we *had* planned,' which would have been proper in the circumstances you accept. You have all made a readily understandable error in concluding that the pronoun 'we' referred to Helen Blayre and Kingsley Pollitt. I suggest it did not. I submit that it referred to someone else."

"But then to whom, Mr. Pons?"

"Why, to the one man with whom she had everything in common—except her penchant for hiking. Pray reflect—she is reported repeatedly to have gone out into the hills and fields carrying books. And books are John Pollitt's life. People concluded, erroneously, that because she was seen with Kingsley Pollitt they were 'walking out' together, when, in fact, she walked with Kingsley only because his brother was sedentary. She never pretended otherwise, because it was with John, not with Kingsley Pollitt, that she had an understanding.

"Mr. Borrow, John Pollitt performed what for him was an act of justice when, anxious lest his brother escape and go to Bristol, he stunned and hanged Kingsley Pollitt from a beam in Kingsley's own rooms. You will find the marks of the rope there

still, if you hurry. I saw them plainly. I saw also slivers from the rope on the stone floor below the beam. In essence, it comes back to this—Pollitt was shunned by everyone and who else but John knew of his brother's determination to go to Bristol to work? Kingsley's body was taken to the Little Hangman not only to remove it from his lodgings, but because it was there that he had killed Helen Blayre.

"Justice failed John Pollitt, Constable—but he did not fail justice. I wish you good luck in your attempt to bring him to trial, but I am not sanguine, in the face of the temper of the people."

Pons' foresight proved correct, for the verdict against John Pollitt was "not proven," and he was set free. A fortnight after the trial, Pons received from Hernshaw a skilfully carved effigy of a hanged man, "to complete your little gibbett," as Hernshaw wrote. Its features bore a remarkable resemblance to those of the late Kingsley Pollitt.

ASSASSIN'S DILEMMA

The High Master of the Mountain was a grim figure as he faced the trembling young man. The Order of the Assassins ruled the medieval Near East through fear—fear of the messengers of the Order who would strike in the night, swiftly, silently, their victims men who opposed the policies of the Order.

The young man had been brought to the retreat a week earlier, his eyes bandaged so that he would not know where he was. He was made to smoke something which had made him sleep. When he woke up, he'd found himself lying on the grass underneath a fruit tree, a beautiful Circassian by his side plucking softly at a lute. Her eyes had lighted as he'd stirred. The next hours—or had it been days—had been incredible, as she had served him rare fruits and foods like nothing he had ever known, and made him deliriously happy.

And then, suddenly, he had found himself back in his lonely cell, his head aching, everything so frighteningly different. The High Master himself had been there (or so he'd dreamed) telling him that for a brief while he had been permitted to visit that paradise to which all True Believers would one day go. He would be permitted to return again, one day, but first he must serve the Order and go to Acre. There was a man there who needed to be punished.

It had seemed so just that this man should die. He had gone to Acre—but he had failed. Somehow he had found his way back.

The old man's eyes were veiled as he wondered what to do next. Should he have the youngster killed, or should he keep him at his side, perhaps let him have another glimpse of paradise—and more hashish, and then give him another assignment. The young man might yet prove a valued member of the Order. It was understandable that he had failed to kill *his brother*—the first time. . . .

the vandyck beard

by . . . Louis Golding

There was a green flicker in his eyes, like a darting lizard. Then the lizard was in a cranny, as he was his old urbane self.

THE telephone-bell rang, but no one in the family moved. The secretary would be in from lunch, and she would take it, in the offices beyond the landing. She came in a few moments later.

"It's for you, Warden," she said. "The Duke of Lechlade."

"Very well," said Dr. Browne, Warden of St. Crispin's, Oxford. "I'll take it here." He tried to keep the satisfaction out of his voice and face; but he did not quite succeed. The others nodded and smiled among themselves. There was no getting away from it. The old man liked to be telephoned by dukes.

He rose and went over to the telephone.

"The Warden here," he said. "Yes, Edward?" Then, not more than a few seconds later, the time it took him to recognize whose voice this really was, he made a gesture as if to replace the receiver, then restored it to his ear again. The invisible speaker went on for a little time, then stopped speaking.

"Well, Henry?" the others overheard. The instrument was half-an-inch from the Warden's

Louis Golding, author of MAGNOLIA STREET *and one of the most distinguished names in English letters, returns with this vignette describing a man who has been "away" for some time and who has returned now to the world he used to know, to the embarrassment of both that world and his harried family.*

ear. They had no doubt whose voice it was.

"I said *well,* Henry?" the voice of the Warden's brother repeated.

Then at last the Warden was able to set the vocal chords working.

"I'm sorry, it slipped my mind. We'll send them on by post at once, whatever we can find."

The voice expostulated. Apparently the post would not be quick enough. "One moment," the Warden said, and put his hand over the instrument. Then he turned to his wife.

"He's started," he said. "I knew it would happen. All right. Let him come. I'm not going to be hectored by him." A flush started in his cheeks and seeped slowly over the cheekbones. He was going to explode with fury. Then Marian, his daughter, broke in.

"No, father. There's no need to force anything. I'll go. Tell him that. I'll go today. I'd like to see Aunt Edith in any case. Ask him exactly where the house is." The Warden hesitated. The brother might ring off any moment. "I'll tell him myself," she said, and rose from her chair. Her father removed his hand from the mouthpiece. "Are you there?" he asked. "Marian says she'll come over some time today."

His voice was cold and thin. The flush had receded from his face, leaving it pale as ivory. "When? I don't know. When can you be there, Marian? It's a hard place to find, he says."

Marian came up to the telephone with pad and pencil, and took the instrument from her father's hand.

"Marian here, Uncle Matthew. I'm very well, thank you." She put down times and directions, said "Good-bye," and replaced the receiver.

There was silence while Marian went back to her chair. She raised her cup of coffee to her lips, but it was cold, and she put it down again.

"Shall we get some more made?" asked her mother. But no. No one wanted any more. The air had gone sour, despite the roses in the rose-bowls and the smell of lavender that came in through the open windows from the College Garden.

"What is he asking for this time?" Mrs. Browne wanted to know.

"It's that old damask linen Aunt Emily left," the Warden said. "You remember. It was to be divided among her nephews. The table-cloths can wait. It's the napkins he wants."

"Yes," said Marian. "He just wants to throw his weight about, I suppose." Her father nodded. "Well, he shall have his table-napkins."

"I don't know where they all are," wailed Mrs. Browne.

"Some have been lost in the wash. I'm sure of it."

"There'll be some to be going on with, won't there?" asked Marian. "Try and find them, mother."

Mrs. Browne rose and made for the door. Then she turned. Her husband was slumped deep into his chair. She shrugged her shoulders and went out. The others rose, too, and followed her. Only Marian was left with him.

"Daddy!" she whispered. He did not raise his head. "Daddy!" she said again.

"You're a good girl, Marian," he whispered. "Where are my spectacles? Will you get them for me?"

She got them for him, then went out. There was a flurry going on among chests-of-drawers and in the cistern-cupboard, but only ten of the table-napkins turned up. They went neat and easily into Marian's brief case. It was believed there should be another eight.

The stopping-place of the omnibus was opposite the Blue Lion, on the road to Witney. A deep wood marches for some distance along the south side of the main road. The lane leading down to "Hatchetts" was some ten minutes' walk away, where the small cross is.

Marian waited for half-a-minute by the cross, as arranged. No one came. Another half-minute passed. Then at last someone appeared, a woman: it was Aunt Edith, in fact. It was almost as if at the last moment her aunt's nerve had failed. You could still see what a pretty woman she had been, though she looked so haggard now, and there were dark half-moons under her eyes.

"Hullo, Aunt Edith!" cried Marian, and ran forward and kissed her. Her cheek was cold, though it was a warm June evening. "You shouldn't have bothered. I'd have found my way. How are you?"

"I'm well, thank you," said Aunt Edith. "You don't know how . . . It's so *nice* of you!"

Marian slipped her free arm round her aunt's waist and squeezed it.

"I came to bring the napkins," she said. "But I really wanted to see you . . . now we're sort of neighbors. The whole family wanted me to come. You know how fond they are of you. You mustn't, my dear," she brought out urgently. She was aware of the quick catch in Aunt Edith's throat. She couldn't bear it if Aunt Edith broke down and started sobbing on her shoulder. Aunt Edith bit her lip. The danger was over. They turned into the lane. It had not rained for some time and the ridges were sharp and hard. The odor of small flowers, ground ivy and agrimony and pimpernel came up

from under the thick undergrowth.

"I understand it's quite a beautiful house," said Marian. "What do you call it? 'Hatchetts'?"

"Yes. Your mother didn't mind my writing, did she? We were lucky. It's modern, of course. But there are some rather lovely old things."

"And quite a decent piece of land?" Marian went on.

Aunt Edith's mind was not working very quickly. She was still thinking about the lovely things. "My grandfather died some months ago. He was a collector." Then her brain registered the other theme. "Oh, land? Yes, about fifteen acres, on the other side beyond these woods." There was silence for some time. A dove cooed in a high elm near at hand. A dove answered from a tree farther away.

"Enough to keep uncle busy," said Marian. "Yet not enough to bore him."

"No," Aunt Edith murmured, and the silence fell again.

"Hatchetts" was a good half-mile away. Yes, Aunt Edith had been quite right. You needed someone to guide you there. It was not even a lane in places, just a track. You came upon the house quite suddenly. The woodland dipped down into a dingle, with a stream running under a rustic bridge, and a little pool in a basin, dappled with water-lily leaves. The house was on the farther slope, rising out of flowering espaliers. There were a great many hydrangeas. The late owner of the house had clearly been a specialist in hydrangeas.

"You'll just have time to tidy yourself up before dinner," said Aunt Edith. "He doesn't like to be kept waiting. We have a married couple living in," she went on. She was making a brave effort at conversation. "He insists on having a man wait at table."

"I wouldn't dream of putting you out. No, aunt, no. I'll catch my bus." How could she bear to have dinner with him?

"He specially said you were to stay for dinner," Aunt Edith pleaded.

She could not ignore the pathos in Edith's voice and eyes. She had better make easy weather of it.

"Well, thank you, if it's not putting you out. How enchanting it all is! You should be very happy here."

Uncle Matthew came out to greet them when they were within some thirty feet of the red-tiled terrace that fronted the porch above them. You noticed the beard at once, a chestnut-brown silken thing, elegantly pointed in the Vandyck mode. He had not previously effected that type of decoration, so far as she knew, but she could not be certain. The clothes were Savile

Row, too, the steely, blue-black dinner-jacket, the impeccably creased trousers, the beetle-shining shoes. It was a stiff shirt and stiff collar. No informal half-measures for Uncle Matthew. He was pale, with the sort of pallor you could expect, but his toilet preparations did something to mitigate that. He held out his arms to her.

"Marian," he said. "How very kind you are. You are most welcome." The formality of speech and manner suited the clothes. He came down towards her and laid his lips soft as a leaf falling on her left temple. It might have been taken as a gesture of forgiveness towards Edith his wife, Marian his niece, Henry his brother, everybody, everything.

"It's so beautiful, Uncle Matthew." She looked round on the ornamental trees, the flower-beds, the sundial, the water-lily pool. "How lucky you are!" Quickly, without a change of tone, she explained: "A place like this coming into the market, so complete." You had to have your wits about you.

"One even has a little bathing-pool," he added, smiling. "You'll forgive me, won't you? One feels one has to put on a black tie in the evening. One does quite a lot of work in the garden. And there are the animals." Yes, thought Marian, it was very proper of one, and how impersonal one was. "It won't take Edith any time to dress, will it, Edith?" The tone of voice suggested that, on the whole, it had better not. "And, Marian, that *can't* be a little dinner frock you have in the brief case there?"

"No, Uncle. It's those table-napkins you asked for. Mother hopes some more will turn up."

"Of course! How stupid of me! Dear Marian! And you undertook to bring them over! Really, how kind you are! How many are there, if I may ask?"

"We found ten."

"Ten?" he repeated. "There should be eighteen!" There was a green flicker in his eyes, like a darting lizard. Then the lizard was in a cranny, out of sight. The eyes were urbane again. He turned to his wife. "Perhaps you'll let Marian tidy up? Dinner in half-an-hour, please." How completely he had taken it for granted! He turned and went off into the house.

The house was very charming, and it had every modern convenience. A great deal of money must have been collected from one source or another. It hardly seemed likely that Edith had been able to lay hands on it all herself. Perhaps Matthew himself had been able to help a little?

"This way," Aunt Edith said, and led her into her own room. It was not the same as her husband's room. Marian tidied up and went down into the sitting-room.

"A gin and something?" asked Uncle Matthew. His sangfroid was beyond praise.

"Pink," said Marian, "thank you." Aunt Edith, not Uncle Matthew, made the drink.

"An olive?"

"Thank you."

"She would like an olive, Edith."

How preposterous it all was! How could one human creature exert so deadly a fascination over another!

"Dinner is served," the manservant announced. It might have been Londonderry House. Uncle Matthew *was* doing himself well. He held out his arm for her. There possibly was a hint of mockery in the gesture, because it was only a few feet from the sitting-room, across the hall, into the dining room, and Marian's tweed skirt hardly lived up to such elaborateness. She placed her fingertips against the side of his arm muscles and went forward with him. The man threw the door open and stood aside like an image. The dining room unfolded. The Sheraton table glowed like copper bowls. The silver and glass and Dutch Still Life over the mantelpiece, the decanters and dishes on the sideboard, the rose-bowl on the table . . . it was conventional, but perfect. Really, it's such deadly *nonsense,* she said to herself.

Then she was aware of a slight stiffening of the muscles against her fingertips. She turned her head. He was looking at the centerpiece of the table, a bowl of bright pink roses, in a Rose Japan Crown Derby bowl. The eyelids dropped over the eyes, the mouth stiffened. Everything was not perfect, not *quite* perfect. Perhaps the pink of the roses, cheerful, rather on the carmine side, *did* clash a trifle with the salmony pink of the bowl, beautiful though it was? It was the "Doctor," wasn't it, rather a blatant kind of rose, maybe? Uncle Matthew half-turned to his wife.

"Again?" he said. That was all. Edith's mouth puckered like a scolded child's. "Again what?" Marian asked herself. Was it the wrong vase? Were they the wrong roses? The salmony-pink and the carmine! Calamitous conjunctions!

"Will you sit here, Marian?" asked her uncle. The man pulled back her chair. Matthew sat down at the head of the table, Edith at the foot. Her chin was low on her breast.

"I'm sorry, dear—" Edith started.

He stroked his beard and gazed at her unblinking for two or three seconds.

"We won't discuss it," he said. That presumably meant the flower arrangement. Salmon-pink, carmine! There was some smoked trout, then a creamed fricassee of chicken. Uncle Matthew was the sort of man who would have the

best of everything. There was a pleasant bottle of Pouilly on ice. He lifted the glass to his lips. Yes, it was cold enough. Aunt Edith's sigh of relief was quite audible. He savoured the wine delicately.

"A *Pouilly Fuissé*, 1933, I think. Is it all right, Marian?" he asked. It was a rhetorical question.

"I suppose it is." She was not going to flatter him by assuming expertness. Besides, she was not happy about the treatment of Aunt Edith, though to be sure she had not expected a cooing among the wine-glasses. If he was aware of the chill in her reply, he gave no sign of it.

Conversation was not vigorous. He had something to say about the garden, the thinning and staking of the red roses. He seemed to know something about it. Edith started off about a washing machine they had found in the kitchen in good order. But once again he stared at her, it did not seem to need more than three or four seconds, and the subject died on her lips. He did not like the washing machine switched on over the Sheraton table. The meal came to an end with a green salad and a ripe Camembert. Aunt Edith rose. Marian rose, too.

"We'll have coffee in the sitting-room," said Aunt Edith.

Matthew moved his arm along the table and touched Marian's hand with his fingertips.

"I hope you don't mind, my dear"—he was addressing his wife and his voice had the silky smoothness of his pointed beard —"I hope you don't mind. Could Marian stay on and crack a few walnuts for me? It would be quite like old times."

That was a fiction. There had never been an old time when Marian cracked walnuts for him. Was this the moment to say something at last? Marian looked into her aunt's eyes.

Please do as he asks, Edith's eyes said. Without a word, Edith went out of the room. Without a word Marian sat down again. The man-servant brought a bowl of nuts over from the sideboard, and put down two fruit plates. Then he brought the decanter.

"Here you are, my dear," said Matthew. That meant the nut-crackers. "Do you mind?"

"No," said Marian without warmth.

He circled the decanter clockwise and set it before her.

"A glass of port, surely? The daughter of an Oxford Common Room!"

"I think not," she said. "Thank you. I'll wait for the coffee."

He shrugged his shoulders, then filled his glass.

"It's Dow '05, you know," he said, as if that might make a difference. He held the glass reverently to the light, then moved

it to and fro under his nostrils. "Delicious," he murmured, and sipped it once, and again, and again. He had the faculty, it seemed, of completely absorbing himself in the moment's thought or act. She took a walnut from the bowl and cracked it.

"Oh, yes, my dear," he said, as if the walnuts had quite gone out of his mind, in the intensity of his meditation on the Dow '05. He poured a little salt on his plate, she placed a cracked nut beside it, then a second, then a third. "Thank you," he murmured. "I don't really deserve it." No. Perhaps he did not.

The man came in with a taper, and hesitated a moment.

"Yes," said Uncle Matthew. The man lit the candlesticks like a Venetian mute, and went out on tip-toe. A few last birds bickered in the evening sky. Then these, too, ceased, and there was no sound at all save the cracking of the walnuts and the clink of the decanter against the glass. Then he sighed. Marian looked across at him.

"Wasn't it horrible," a voice asked, "over there?" She realized with embarrassment it was her own voice.

He was smiling now. She saw the flash of his teeth in the candlelight. Then he raised his hand to his beard and stroked it affectionately.

"It was this," he said, meaning the Vandyck beard. "All the years . . . in Dartmoor . . . weren't so bad at all. It was the six weeks it took me to get this beard right . . . they were the very devil. Shall we go in for our coffee now?"

NEXT MONTH—

more thrilling stories of Murder and Intrigue—

Carter Dickson's PERSONS OR THINGS UNKNOWN

George Harmon Coxe's THE DOCTOR CALLS IT MURDER

Hugh Pentecost's THE MAN WHO HAD NO FRIENDS

Burnham Carter's ASSASSIN

B. Traven's CEREMONY SLIGHTLY DELAYED

Leslie Charteris' THE LOVING BROTHERS

and Lawrence Treat's exciting new story, THE UNITED NATIONS MURDER CASE

—in THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

he came back

by . . . Richard Hardwick

They didn't see it at first. But, when they did, old Joe let out a scream that must have been heard back home.

THE one-day hauls were over. The shrimp had come in from nowhere and the *Big Bill* started making ice hauls—staying out for a week or more at a time. Captain Joe signed on another hand. That was how Crasna came to be on the shrimp boat *Big Bill*. Up until then, it was just Captain Joe and me and everything went along O.K. I had known Captain Joe all my life and I worked for him only because it paid good and I needed the money. The old man was as mean as sin. There was a sort of saying around home in Georgia that everybody who knew old Joe celebrated every year when his boat headed south.

I don't remember how it started, but Captain Joe and this fellow Crasna—*Crazy* Crasna, I called him—had their first run-in before we were an hour out of port. It was over something in the galley. Crasna had been hired as cook as well as striker. They were both fuming and that's not good aboard a boat when you're liable to be cooped up with the same two or three men for days or weeks at a time.

This is not a mystery story in the orthodox sense of the words, but it is a story about a murder, set against a unique background. Richard H. Hardwick, who lives on an island off the Georgia coast, writes here about the kind of men he knows, their temper—and how much they can stand. . . .

The same routine every day gets monotonous as hell, even if you get along with your shipmates; but when there's something between you, then the boat shrinks up and you can't turn around without butting into the guy. Tempers can get short in a few days of this and if there's any liquor aboard—and old Joe always carried plenty—then things can get serious in a hurry.

The mistake Crasna made was when he laughed at Joe's ideas. Now, I'd be the first to admit that Joe's ideas were as screwy as any I ever heard, but a man's got to overlook certain things sometimes in order to get along. Old Joe, for instance, whenever the coast of Georgia was out of sight, got the idea he was captain of a ship. He was getting old and that had something to do with it. You wouldn't know it by looking at him, but old Joe was pushing sixty. He issued orders on the boat and, hell, I played along with him and said "aye, aye" and all the rest, and just kept a close tab on the pounds we unloaded waiting for my cut. I always made good money working for Captain Joe.

But this "Crazy" Crasna, when he came aboard in Tampa, started right away laughing at Joe. I tried to tell him to cut it out but he laughed at me too. Captain Joe was burned. I could tell by looking at him. "Crazy" was a small man, with the arrogance a lot of small men have. When he saw he was getting under Joe's skin, he really turned the heat on.

Then we got the reports that they were really making some hauls over in the Bay of Campeche. Joe went over there every year about this time and so we started off across the Gulf of Mexico. It's close to a thousand miles from Tampa to Tampico and on the first day out, "Crazy" started living up to his name. He started acting crazy — saying things that didn't make any sense at all, but all directed at Captain Joe. He razzed Joe's running the lousy boat like a ship and he mocked everything he said. After a couple of days I began to think they were both crazy. Maybe I was right, or maybe I was the one who was nuts to ever get out on a boat with two guys like that.

We got across somehow without too much trouble and started working down the Bay. Most of the shrimping is done at night down there and this just about doubles the danger involved. A man overboard at night has little chance of feeling the deck under him again. A foot can slip, a piece of swinging gear can hit him, next thing he knows he's treading black water and the boat's moving away in its spot of light. It's not a good place to have an enemy.

I don't know why Joe didn't fire Crasna, except that maybe after a while Joe felt he had a

point to prove and he would prove it, come hell or high water.

I can remember nights on deck, calm nights out there in the Bay of Campeche, when we were pulling the net. We'd drag for anywhere up to four hours before we hauled in. The floodlights up in the rigging would cast little splotches of light on the water just around the boat. It always seemed to me that this only made the sea seem all the blacker. Behind the boat, the swirl from the screw gave the water the appearance of thick black oil. It was on those nights —fifteen or twenty miles out from Mexico—that I was glad to be on speaking terms with the two other guys on the boat. I would have hated to see Captain Joe look at me the way he looked at "Crazy"! It wasn't that I was yellow. I'm no powerhouse but I would have stood up to either one of those guys and slugged it out. It wasn't that. On a seventy-foot boat in the middle of a coal-black sea, it wouldn't take much of a shove to do you in.

"Joe," Crasna said one morning when we were finishing heading the shrimp and getting ready to eat, "Joe, you're getting pretty old. You ain't got many more trips left in you." Then he laughed. Crasna laughed a kind of running laugh, like a gear had slipped in his throat. And the smile—it looked like it was painted on his face and that nothing could erase it. What he said taunted old Joe and the laugh and the way "Crazy" looked at him taunted him even more. "Crazy" would say things like that all the time as if testing the old man. Seeing just how far he could go with him.

They'd get to arguing over something and when I'd try to bust it up, they'd both jump me.

"Mind your own damned business!" both of them would shout. "Crazy" would get the smile on his face and Joe would scowl like a bulldog. I minded my own business after that.

Shrimping was good our first week out, but on a shrimp boat you have a lot of time on your hands. The net is out for hours at a time and then you've got time to read or sleep or listen to the radio—or needle the other guys on the boat. "Crazy" never let up on the old man. It got worse and worse until one night —it was around midnight—they lit into each other. Crasna was younger by twenty-five years but he was also smaller by as many pounds. I was lying on my bunk reading a magazine when I heard the ruckus. Something bounced off the outside of the cabin and I ran out to see what was going on. There they were, going round and round, the floodlights shining down on them just like an arena and the damned shrimp boat running itself. "Crazy" was laughing all the while. It wasn't

a funny laugh, he was just laughing, taunting the old man. And Captain Joe was cursing and swearing and picking up anything that came to hand and throwing it at Crasna.

I don't know how it would have ended if the net hadn't hit that snag. The boat slowed and threw us all off balance. Joe, by the instinct of twenty-five years of pulling nets, ran to the wheelhouse and eased back on the throttle. Crasna just sat down and kept laughing. It was then I saw the knife in his hand. He must have just pulled it when the net snagged. I wondered if Joe saw it.

By the time we got the mess straightened out, they had both cooled off; but neither one of them had forgotten it and neither made any effort at handshaking or any other halfway friendly gesture. The feud was still on full steam. The coming weeks didn't appeal to me at all. I began to wonder why I hadn't taken up railroading like my old man wanted me to.

It was about four nights after this that I had an accident. There was a heavy ground swell running from the east and Crasna and I were hauling the heavy net doors aboard. I was leaning out trying to get hold of a line and the doors took a swing and caught me in the back. I fell against the low rail and with that roll the *Big Bill* was doing I'd have pitched right on over into the Gulf if Crasna hadn't been there. He grabbed the back of my shirt and hauled me back aboard. I wasn't hurt badly, but my back was sore as hell and my shoulder felt like it was sprained. Crasna helped me in to my bunk. My attitude about Crasna changed a good bit that night.

Captain Joe came in and asked me how I felt.

"I'll be back out in a few minutes," I said. "This'll pass over."

"I didn't ask you when you'd be back out. I asked you how you felt," he growled.

"Not worth a damn," I said truthfully.

"Me and Crasna will handle the net tonight. You won't be no good to us if you get worse. Let it rest tonight." He turned and went out.

I laid back and the next thing I remember Joe was shaking me.

"Wake up! Wake up!" he shook me harder.

I sat up in the bunk, the shoulder giving me a fit. It was still dark out ahead of the wheelhouse.

"I'll be out soon as I can get my boots on," I mumbled, half asleep.

"It's Crasna," Captain Joe said. "Something's happened to him!"

I was out of the bunk and on my feet in a second. "What is it? What's happened?"

Old Joe looked a little scared. He stood there in the middle of the cabin, moving back and forth with the roll of the boat. He didn't seem to know what to say.

"He—he, well, the boat took a bad roll, and he went over the side!"

He looked at me as if waiting for me to do something.

"We better look for him," Joe said after a while.

We went out on deck and pulled the net aboard and started the hopeless business of plowing back and forth across those shifting hills of water looking for a man who was most likely on the bottom. Joe called on the radio to whatever boats were in the area and could hear him. After a while we saw the running lights of several boats. The talk flew back and forth over the radio and finally they agreed it would be better to wait till daylight.

I fixed a pot of coffee and Joe and I sat down at the table in the galley and drank. We were silent. I was waiting for him to say something.

"Clumsy, that's what it was. The damned fool took too many chances to be all there." Joe tilted his coffee cup and drained it at a gulp.

"Did you see him when he went overboard, Captain Joe?" I asked. We hadn't had time to talk about it; we had been so busy looking for Crasna.

"Sure!" He poured himself another cup. "I was standing right there in the wheelhouse door like always. We was circling around fixing to pull the net in. Crasna was standing there by the winch. We came broadside to the seas and a big one rolled under her. Then Crasna stumbled backwards, tripped over the rail, and *plunk!* Right in the drink just as pretty as you please!"

The old man smiled when he finished. It didn't seem funny to me but I knew how those two felt about each other and I had known Captain Joe long enough to realize he was a lot of things, but he wasn't two-faced.

Captain Joe was the only witness to whatever it was that had happened to Crasna. The search the next morning didn't turn Crasna up, nor did anybody expect it to. The authorities radioed Joe he could make his report when he came in. We stayed on while the shrimping got better and better.

We trawled up and down the Bay for almost another week. Captain Joe sang all the time and smiled like a kid on Christmas morning. Ever since Crasna went overboard Captain Joe was a changed man. The thorn was out of his side. Me, I had ideas of my own about what happened that night when I was in my bunk with the stove-up shoulder.

Then—I guess it was about the last part of that week—we

were pulling the net aboard one night. The sea was dark under a layer of slow-moving clouds and the wind was light. There was a long, lazy ground swell. The floodlights bounced off the oily sea and the net came up dripping and wriggling. It looked like a good haul as I winched the bag higher, pulled it inboard, and laid it on the wide work deck. Captain Joe throttled back and came astern to help me. I pulled the string to open the net and we started dumping the stuff out. We didn't see it right away, there was so much shrimp and fish in the net. But when we saw it, old Joe let out a scream that could have been heard all the way back to Georgia. It was a body. A man's body. And it was swollen and bloated and smelled like hell. And that wasn't all—it was *Crasna!* "Crazy" Crasna! There was that big silver chain bracelet that he always wore. It was almost imbedded in the swollen flesh but there was no doubt about it, it was Crasna!

Old Joe stepped back, his mouth hanging open, and a noise like a cross between a gargle and a whistle coming out. I don't think he even heard himself screaming. The body slipped out on ball-bearings of wet shrimp and fish and slowly turned over on the deck. It wouldn't have taken a brain surgeon to diagnose that place on the back of his head, either. His head had been cracked open. Captain Joe had split his skull and tossed him over the side. He had personally gotten rid of his tormentor.

Then suddenly, my *own* predicament hit me! I was the only person on earth who knew what had happened. The only person, that is, other than Captain Joe. And here we were out in the middle of the sea and all old Joe had to do now was to crack my head and throw us *both* over the side. I was sweating blood as I turned to face Captain Joe.

When I saw him, all the fear went out of me. All the starch was gone out of him. He was sitting on the deck looking at the body lying there before him and just sort of blubbering. He had completely cracked up. He followed me like a pet dog when I led him to the cabin and put him in his bunk. I locked the door, though, just in case.

I put Crasna's body in the ice bins and started the long haul back to Tampico. I did a lot of thinking on the way back. I decided to do what my old man wanted me to do. I'm going back to the States and get a job on the railroad.

ghosts don't make noise

by . . . Richard Sale

Why had Croak Mitchell come back from the dead to haunt the house where beautiful Andrea DuBoise was living?

I ONCE wrote in my daily column, "Crime on Broadway," that there were no such things as ghosts. Only memories. I stated further that every ghost I had ever met was a phony. No doubt a lot of ghosts resented this, but none ever visited me, shaking chains at me and giving me the works to take back the libel and write a refutation. I will say, though, a lot of fake mediums and opportunists made my life miserable for a while by offering to show me real ghosts and such.

Thank heaven for a gentleman named Joseph Dunninger who will still pay a lot of money to any gazabo who can produce a bona fide ghost from the great beyond. I referred all these charlatans to him.

So it was with some surprise, this Friday morning, that when I greeted Dinah Mason, that hard-headed, realistic cynic and non-beater-around-the-busher, with a cheerful "Top o' the milk to you," she replied gloomily: "Listen and list, Golden Boy. I crave words with you on the unobstructed universe."

Richard Sale's irrepressible Broadway columnist, Daffy Dill, had insisted that there were no such things as ghosts—until that evening when he found himself in the room where the gangster had been killed, watching an unseen hand write a message from beyond the grave—a message meaning Death.

Copyright, 1941, by Popular Publications, Inc.

"Meaning what?" I said. "Do you feel psychic?"

"Never mind about me," said Dinah. "How do you feel about ectoplasm?"

"Why," I said, "I think it's pretty tenuous stuff and I'm inclined to vote against it, and besides, I think the best thing for that hangover of yours is a pair of mated aspirin, a cup of bromo, and an ice pack, or if you feel like taking the low road, a stiff slip of the nectar of Courvoisier will set you right. Better pink elephants than ectoplasm. You don't look well at that."

"Is that so?" Dinah said drily, shaking her lovely hair at me. She looked like a million dollars (in Fort Knox gold), she smelled like Schiaparelli's "Shocking" which is something, and for all its acridity, her voice was still the next best thing to a harp's low string.

"Well, darling, if I looked as bad as you say, a lot of good money has been wasted. I've had my hair waved, my nails manicured, my face fixed, and other trivia put in good repair, and there has never been a pink elephant in my life. No, brother, not even a sparrow on my shoulder in the morning."

"Then I don't get it," I said. "You were never spook-conscious before. Have you been reading Oliver Lodge?"

"Not exactly," said Dinah. "But a spook never came into my life before. It's just the new apartment I rented."

As a matter of fact, I hadn't even seen the new apartment she had rented. But I understood that it was a very nice affair. It was on West 55th, not far off Fifth Avenue, in that new, white brick modernistic joint which is simply beclouded with glass and open terraces. "You mean it's haunted?" I said.

"No, but it might as well be. My place is on the third floor and it overlooks a small alley, about six feet wide. Across the alley is one of those brownstones, remodeled, and a friend of mine has rented the whole place. She's the one who's haunted, and I wouldn't mind at all, Daffy, except she's a level-headed and swell sort of gal who still doesn't believe in ghosts."

I said, "You sure sound convinced."

"I'm not exactly skeptical," Dinah said. "The first few nights, she called across the alley and asked me if I would come over and spend the night with her. So I did. Now when she calls across the alley, it's just the opposite; she comes over to spend the night with me. The place is lousy with ectoplasm, and let me tell you something, darling. This ghost isn't like these white things with chains you read about. This ghost just walks around and you never can see him, but he is right there. He's been there, so close

to me, he's pulled out my hair pins just for fun."

I cocked an eye at her. "Are you sure you feel all right?" I said.

"As sure as I'm sitting here," she replied soberly, "that son-of-a-gun of an ectoplasmic kibitzer pulled a handful of hairpins right out of my hair and sprinkled them on the floor. Daffy, that's minor. He's an amazing ghost, does the most marvelous things, and doesn't seem to want to hurt anybody, but you never can tell."

"I think you're crazy," I said. "It's all right telling ghost stories, but you sound as if you actually believed in this one."

Dinah shrugged. "I guess I do believe in this one. How can I help it? But I'm not sleeping well. Either I'm at Andrea's place and we both lie awake clutching each other all night, or else she's at my house, and we don't get any shut-eye just from worrying what the doggone spook is doing over there. You can hear him all night long, even in my apartment, if you leave both windows open."

"Ghosts," I said, in the vernacular, "don't make no noise. So he is a phony creep, and I'm the guy to tell him so."

"Well, that's fine," said Dinah. "That's the idea exactly. Andrea's boy friend—by the way, this femme I'm talking about is Andrea DuBoise, the singing-dancing lead of the current musical Mr. American—her boy friend wouldn't have any part of it. He just laughed it off but he was scared stiff. So we're counting on you. That's what I was going to ask you, if you'd spend a night in the house, ghost-breaking."

"Alone?" I said.

"We could stay with you, if you wanted it that way," Dinah said. "Two to one, so I guess we wouldn't need a chaperone. You could have the room that Croak died in, and Andrea and I could stay in her room."

"Whoa," I said. "There are details which seem to have slipped by the board. Who is Croak?"

"Croak Mitchell, the gangster."

I said: "But he was the mobster that Thomas Dewey nabbed and hoped to use as his big witness in breaking up the food racketeering ring. Croak Mitchell was hidden out some place by the D.A.'s office and was knocked off."

"That's right," said Dinah placidly. "The D.A.'s office rented this brownstone, and they hid him out in it with a pair of detectives, but somebody got through somehow and murdered Croak. Somebody murdered him in the upstairs bedroom. Shot him while he was sleeping in the bed. That's the room you're going to have."

I gulped. "Isn't that sweet of you?"

"Not at all."

"And who is Andrea DuBoise's boy friend?"

"Wade Lowenstein."

There was something wrong here and I knew it, and she looked as if she didn't know it. Wade Lowenstein was a shady boy. A very shady boy. Plenty of dough and no visible means of support, and so doggone slippery that he didn't even have a police record. When you are a crime reporter, you hear things scattered around and I had heard somewhere, that the wise guys figured it was Wade Lowenstein had put the slug on Croak Mitchell. The betting went that Mitchell was the front in the food-racketeering setup and that as usual Wade Lowenstein, the Man Nobody Ever Nailed, was the brains behind the machinery. Afraid that Mitchell would talk, he nailed Mitchell.

You hear a lot of perfect theories, and most of them never pan out. "Still," I said after explaining this to Dinah in somewhat prosy fashion, "isn't your girl friend kind of a queer duck to take up with such a ginzo? What's the matter with her? Is she homely?"

"She is almost, but not quite," Dinah replied, "as stunning as I am. Don't kid yourself darling, she is almost out of this world. And if Andrea likes queer ducks, what's that to you? People are always asking me what the devil I go around with you for anyway? You're the queerest of them all."

"But Lowenstein was thought to have been the one who murdered Croak Mitchell!"

"IS that so? I don't believe it. He's too nice. But he was awfully scared of the ghost. Incidentally, we call the ghost Bingo. No surname—just Bingo. I wish we could be sure he was nice."

"Good Lord," I said, "I'll ghost-break the house. I'll have to do something to stop your talking like this about him. You're getting so's you actually believe in him."

"Wait," said Dinah smugly. "Just wait, brother."

Isn't it funny how a woman will get you mixed up in the darnedest things?" There I was, all ready to go through another day being a newspaper reporter, writing my column, getting bawled out by the Old Man ad infinitum, and along came Dinah. Zingo, I was a ghost-breaker.

Now as you well know, since most of you are confirmed nonbelievers in ghosts, it is one thing to say there ain't no such thing as creeps, and it is quite another to prove it. Ghost-breaking, even for a phony shade, is no fun, no frolic in springtime. Especially in haunted houses. Especially when your best girl, who not only is

the most beautiful woman in the world, but also one of its wisest, believes she has seen ectoplasm in operation.

What I mean is, if a guy like Wade Lowenstein who was pretty hot stuff on the long end of a gun, and a rugged sort of in-fighter in the clinches, if he could get scared in the house where Croak died, why shouldn't I? I'm not Horatio.

I worried about the darn thing all day long, and at five-thirty, when I knocked off, Dinah came home to my place with me, and I picked up my gun, my toothbrush and my pajamas and then we went to her new apartment for supper.

It was a perfect little place, brand new, spotless, modern and bright, and she'd invested in a lot of nice furniture. "Oh, man," I said, "why shut-eye in a haunted house when we have this? Dinah, honey, I could live here with you forever."

"We're not married," she said.

"That is not my fault," I said, "and if a little detail like that is going to bother you, run out and get a preacher somewhere and bring him back and get it over with. I've stopped asking you to be my ball and chain. It's too futile."

"Some day I'm going to surprise you," Dinah said.

"Darling," I said, "you always surprise me."

Just then the doorbell rang, and Dinah answered it. In walked a girl. I am just going to let it go at that. A girl. She was Andrea DuBoise, and if I really described her you'd think I wasn't crazy about Dinah Mason anymore. What I mean is, this Andrea was a Betty Grable in brunette. Jet-black hair, the sort of figure that makes dressmakers weep, and talent scouts dream, and rejected suitors cut their throats from east to west. I don't wish to go on because you might get the wrong idea. But Andrea was a dish.

"Hello, Daffy," she said, after Dinah introduced us. She had a twinkle in her eye. "So you're going to ghostbreak my house for me. I'm glad that someone is. The darn spook was around the place all afternoon, and I didn't go anywhere but what he followed me. It's enough to make you mad sometimes."

I gulped. "Drive you crazy, you mean?"

"No, just make you mad. I was telling Wade—that's Wade Lowenstein, my boy friend—I was telling him that the ghost is Croak Mitchell's ghost, and Wade just laughed at me. But the ghost wrote his initials on the wall this afternoon, and they were C.M."

"How could a ghost write his initials on the wall?" I said. "This is getting whacky. Someone else just scribbled them on."

"Oh, no," she said. "I saw him

do it. Well, I couldn't see *him,* of course, but I saw the initials come right out of nothing on the wall. I wish you could get him out of the house."

"How do you know it's a him?"

She arched her eyebrows. "I guess a girl can tell. Sometimes he gets pretty fresh. He's always there when I take a shower. But what can I do? You can't see him anywhere."

"And why do you think he's haunting your house?"

Andrea sat down and knitted her brows. "To be perfectly frank, I think he's trying to tell me something. Not just me. Anyone who can get his drift. Wasn't that your impression, Dinah?"

"Yeah man," Dinah said. "That was my impression exactly. Daffy, it's as though he's trying to get across to somebody the name of the man who murdered him, or some evidence on it or something. He might have left some evidence before he died, you know."

"He was shot and killed in bed," I said. "How could he have left any evidence?"

"He was shot in bed," Andrea said, "but he didn't die there. He lived long enough to crawl out of the bed to his bureau and when they found him, he was dead in front of the bureau, but he lived to get there, so why couldn't he have left some clue to his killer's identity which he now, as a ghost, is trying to tell us about?"

It never occurred to me at that moment to ask Andrea DuBoise, how she knew that Croak Mitchell had not died instantly. As a matter of fact, there wasn't any non-policeman in New York who had more opportunity to learn about such details than myself, and I didn't know it. But I didn't ask her then, and if I had she'd probably have beat around the bush. She said: "Wade is coming over later, Dinah, before the show. He'll take me to the theater. Suppose we let Daffy acclimate himself to the house while I'm at the theater?"

"Good idea," Dinah said.

"Thanks," I said. And added drily: "For absolutely nothing."

Wade Lowenstein arrived at Dinah's just after supper. He was a slick article with one of those semi-amused smiles on his pan all the time. He was dark, with a sort of Latin appeal and he had plenty of what it takes, because he wasn't even wary of me. He didn't believe in the ghost. Not a bit.

"It's all nonsense," he said with a smile. "The girls are just taking you for a ride, Dill. They took me for one, I admit it. They even scared me."

"I'm inclined to feel the same way," I said.

"Well," Dinah remarked, "the time has come for you to get on

and settle down in your vigil at the house. Me, I'm staying right here in my own place. I'll sleep in Andrea's room later when she gets back from the theater."

"All right," I said wearily. "Cart my carcass over and deposit me in the charnel house, and I'll report to you, negatively, when you all show up at eleven-thirty. That the idea?"

"Right. Let's go."

We went downstairs and out on the street, and then we walked next door to the brownstone house. Andrea got out her key and she started to put it in the lock when the door suddenly opened. I peered in. There wasn't a soul in the vestibule.

Andrea said: "Oh, dear, he's here already. He opened the door. I never even touched it."

"Shut the door again," I said. She didn't move so I grabbed it and shut it. Then I tried to open it, but it was locked. I glanced at her, and nodded, and she took the key and reached toward the lock, but the door swung open before she could unlock it. I jumped into the vestibule, but I was alone in it. I felt a little funny.

I must have looked it. Andrea said: "I don't think he'll hurt you, Daffy. Be brave and go on in."

With a jibe like that, what could you do? I walked in, trying to look nonchalant. They all came after me. She had a nice place there, for although the house was old, it had been marvelously remodeled, and her furnishings sparkled with warmth. "You won't retire until we come back," said Andrea. "So here is the living room, and here is the dining room, and here is the kitchen. I'll show you upstairs later. Got to run to the theater. Come on, Wade."

I said to Dinah: "At least you can stay."

Dinah said: "I'll be back in this whisper factory when Andrea gets back and not before. Keep your guard up, Daffy, and good luck. Just remember, there ain't no such things as ghosts."

With that, they all turned and scooted out. They didn't waste any time. Not even Wade Lowenstein paused too long to say goodbye. He didn't care for this house much. And he didn't like hanging around.

I sat there in the haunted living room for exactly one hour by the clock and nothing happened to me. Mind you, I was mildly green during the interval because those kids had built up the thing pretty well and they'd almost got me to believing in the ghost of Croak Mitchell. But for sixty minutes, I sat in the armchair, without even lighting a cigarette, a feat I will not be able to duplicate for many years. I listened and did not hear a sound. I looked but did not see a thing. I scented

but could not smell an uneasy odor in Denmark. All was well.

After that, I relaxed. It was a gag. The whole works was a gag. I didn't know what Dinah's game was. Or Andrea's. But I was in it and they seemed to want me in it for one reason or another, and there was no harm in playing along.

So I took out a cigarette and lighted it. And I leaned back in the chair feeling very happy about the whole thing, because here again was a haunted house without a haunt, and there wasn't any such thing as ghosts. I puffed on languidly and picked up a book named *Delilah* and I started to read. Suddenly I stopped feeling so damn smug—

Something had happened, and I wasn't quite sure what it was. I'd heard something, like a footstep, and yet I hadn't heard anything at all. The rug in the living room was a creamy thing with a nap about an inch thick. I found myself staring at it.

There was good reason for this, as I saw a moment later. Footprints came across that rug. Not actual prints, just the depressions in the carpet. So help me Hannah, I saw them, as though the weight of a man were on the rug. They were distinctly in the shape of a shoe, and the rug depressed as each step descended. They moved to the lounging chair opposite me and they stopped there, finally disappearing.

But as they disappeared, the cushion in the easy chair was depressed as though someone had sat down. The cushion even rustled, under the weight. *But there wasn't a soul in the chair!*

By then, I was in a cold sweat, and my cigarette was burning my fingers. I stared at that chair. Someone was sitting there. He was staring at me. Have you ever been stared at by a nothing?

I couldn't move.

Across the alley, I heard a window go up. I managed to turn around and I saw Dinah waving at me. I tried to move again, failed, then made it and got out of the chair. I ran to the window and opened it and she said: "How's the ghost, darling? Any sign of him yet?"

"Any sign of him?" I screamed. "The formless son-of-a-gun is sitting right here in the chair opposite me! What do you do about it?"

"Oh," she said, "he's there then? But, Daffy, you don't believe in ghosts. What are you afraid of? You're a ghost-breaker. Just go over and poke him one in the nose."

"There's nothing to poke," I said. "He's the little man who wasn't there. I can see where he's sitting but I can't see him."

"That's just like him," she said. She looked worried.

"Come on over," I said. "I'd feel a lot braver and more like being a ghost-breaker if I had my

best girl to defend. As it is, I just feel like a fool, sitting here with him staring at my throat."

"All right," Dinah said. "I'll come over. But it's against my better judgment. I don't like that place. That ghost gets too darn familiar." She closed her window and disappeared from sight.

A few minutes later she was knocking on the front door. I'd forgotten about letting her in. I'd just been standing there, staring at the ghost in the chair. Suddenly, the cushion relaxed as though the guy had got up. I heard the knocking then and I started to go out and let Dinah in. But she was already in. She met me at the entrance of the living room. My eyes bugged.

"I know," Dinah gulped. "He let me in, not you. The door opened and there he was. Nobody standing right there in nothing—sometimes it gets funny, but if the creep ever took it into his head to get rough, the results wouldn't be funny. Come on, I'll hold your hand."

So we went back into the living room. By this time, I was beginning to get sore at myself because I was beginning to believe in the myth and after all, there are no such things as ghosts.

"This is a hoax," I told Dinah. "I don't understand the purpose, but this Andrea gal is practical joking you and me."

"Is that so?" Dinah whispered. "How academic! It would be easier to believe it if I didn't have to watch that."

She pointed. I looked across the room and saw a book lying on the table between two iron bookends. Someone was slowly turning the pages, one by one, with care. Sometimes slowly sometimes fast. Only there wasn't anyone there!

Well, it was the sort of thing that makes your knees knock, but at this point I was ready for anything. I strode across the room. The creep saw me coming for he suddenly slammed the book shut. And when I got there, I couldn't feel anyone around. I groped, not wanting to touch something unseen. I didn't. Then I picked up the book. It was a little thing called *The Gardener's Handbook*. There was dried blood on it. I set it down again and shook my head. "I don't—g-g-get it," I said.

"Daffy," Dinah said.

"What?"

"He's over here. Right in front of me. Look at the rug."

There he was all right. I glanced at Dinah and as I did so, a handful of her hairpins left her hair and fell on the back of the chair and then to the floor.

She wailed: "I wish he wouldn't do that! Tell him not to do that, Daffy, please tell him, and then let's get out of here!"

"Are you crazy?" I said. "You can't talk to a ghost. They just ain't. It's a trick. Keep your hair

on and be quiet a moment. What about this book? It's got blood on it."

"Is that the gardening book?" Dinah said, white.

"Yes, what about it?"

"That's the book that Croak Mitchell was reading when he was murdered," said Dinah.

"Andrea told me all about it. For a gangster, Croak figured himself quite the amateur gardener. Or maybe it was his hobby, killing by day, peonies by night —you know what I mean? Anyway, the whole time that the D.A.'s office was holding him here, he'd read that darn gardening book and figured out what sort of garden he would have when he finally beat the rap, if ever. Maybe he was planning one for Sing Sing. The night he was murdered, he was reading the book and he carried it with him to the bureau when he crawled out of bed, dying, and that's how the blood got on it."

"Yeah?" I said. "And how did Andrea get it? The case was never solved. This would be an exhibit. The cops aren't handing out any exhibits."

"No one knew it was an exhibit," said Dinah. "It was lying there, closed on the bureau and I guess nobody saw the bloodstains inside it, so no one took it along. It belonged to the house, and the house was rented. And I don't see how it's an exhibit just because a dying man got some blood on it. There aren't any messages in blood or anything like that, because we looked through it."

I stared at the book. "Why the devil would a ghost read a book? If there were a ghost?"

"I don't know," Dinah said. "I have a feeling he's going to pull out my hairpins again. Tell him to stop."

"Don't be silly," I said. "I think you're in on this thing too. It's all a put up job of some sort, and I'm the sucker."

No one pulled out her hairpins.

Dinah said: "He's getting nicer. Or else he isn't down here anymore. That could be. I've been watching the rug and I don't see his impressions anymore."

I glanced around at the rug. It makes you feel so silly looking for something you don't believe is there. Yet I'd seen enough to raise the hackles on my back, and to make my mouth run dry, and to scare the living daylights out of me. But still, I wasn't convinced. Being afraid of the supernatural is natural, being convinced is something else again.

"He's probably upstairs," said Dinah. "Sometimes you can hear him going up. The stairs creak as he goes."

"Ghosts don't make noise, honey chile," I said. "If he squeaks, he's no ghost."

"Listen."

We listened. Someone was going upstairs. The creak of the staircase was measured and slow with each footstep. I ran out into the hall, and I had my gun in my hand this time. I'll admit I was flabbergasted. *There was no one on the stairs.* I listened sharply. It was the most uncanny thing you could imagine. Slowly, measuredly, those steps going up the stairs, each step creaking noisily as the weight was pressed upon it. Someone was going up those stairs. I couldn't believe my own ears. But there was the sound of it, going up, until it reached the top and was gone. It was maddening. Alone in the house, it would have turned your hair gray.

I wanted to go up but, to tell you the truth, my nerve wasn't quite that good. I stood there listening. Presently I heard a sigh. It was a ghastly, plaintive and metallic sort of sigh. I turned and went back into the living room. I said: "Your friend has gone upstairs. Does he prefer to haunt the upper reaches?"

"That's not funny," said Dinah. "He does."

"Why?" I said quietly.

"We thought it was the book at first," said Dinah, her voice a whisper. "That's why—there's someone at the door."

The ghost didn't let them in either. The ghost was upstairs so this time I let them in. Andrea DuBoise and her boy friend, Wade Lowenstein were back. They took one look at me, and Andrea said: "I see you've been communing with my ectoplasmic friend. So it's no joke, is it, Daffy?"

"I don't know yet," I said.

Lowenstein stared at me and wet his lips. Then he chuckled harshly. "You don't believe all this stuff, do you, Dill? You look kind of green around the gills. You look as if—"

"—as if he'd seen a ghost," said Dinah. She didn't look so happy herself. "Yeah and verily, maybe he has."

"Wade won't believe it either," said Andrea. "It just happens he's never seen my friend at work. What did the creep do to you, Daffy?"

I told her. I just told her straight. My hands were shaking a little. Wade Lowenstein kept looking at me, and his eyes were big and his face got a little pallid.

"Dinah was just going to tell me why the creep haunts upstairs mostly, when you both came in."

"Well," said Andrea, "I used to think it was the book. Did Dinah tell you about the book that Croak Mitchell was reading when he was shot and killed? Well, that book was up in the bedroom on the bureau and one night I woke up and saw the pages turning as though someone were thumbing through it, trying to find something. The creep

came to do that so often, sighing all the time—"

"Sighing!" I said.

"Oh," she said. "So you've heard that horrible little sigh he drops now and then?"

"I'll say I have," I replied.

Lowenstein held up his hands. "Wait a second, kids. You two are blowing your toppers. You're talking yourselves into believing in this ghost." He laughed nervously. "Croak Mitchell is a dead herring. He ain't coming back here anymore. They cremated him, didn't they?"

Up above us, someone walked across the room. We could hear him as plain as day. Lowenstein looked up. He said: "Andrea, you've got someone in this house."

"That's the creep," she said.

"Creep, my foot," he snapped. "That's the bedroom up there, ain't it? Someone's in your bedroom. Maybe it's a heist. Come on, Dill, let's see about this."

We all ran up the stairs as quietly as possible, but the stairs creaked. Even so, when we reached the bedroom door and listened, we could still hear someone inside walking. Then there was that awful sigh. And the walking again.

"Come on," Lowenstein growled. He threw open the door and we stepped in as I turned on the lights. Lowenstein had a .45 out in his hand, and it was an ugly gun. I looked at it because there wasn't anything else to look at. The room was empty.

"What the devil!" he said.

You could still hear the footsteps. They were very close to us. They passed us; they stopped. Not a soul to be seen.

"I'm going nuts," said Lowenstein. "I'm getting outa here."

Andrea said coolly: "I always thought that Croak Mitchell tried to write a message as he was dying. They found him with a pen in his hand, a fountain pen, but they never found a message. Then I watched the gardening book when the creep thumbed through it, and he would always stop at a certain place, and I found a blank piece of paper in the place. Like a marker. There wasn't anything written on it, but he always seemed to want me to find it. It's still in the book."

"Bring the book up here," I said. "Let's see what happens."

"No," said Lowenstein. "Let's get out of here."

"Afraid, Wade?" Andrea said.

"All right, get the book. Mitchell never left any message. He was shot, wasn't he?"

She brought up the book and she laid it down on the bureau between two metal bookends. "Now watch," she whispered. "He's in here all right. I'll bet he does it again. It's as if he had named his murderer and left it behind for the police. Watch."

The room was deathly still. Then there were faint footsteps.

Our eyes were glued to the book. Suddenly the cover opened with a snap, and pages began to flip by as though someone were thumbing through it. It was a damned clever thing. The pages suddenly stopped. There was a small, blank sheet of paper like a place marker, where they had stopped. Then that ghastly sigh, and all was still.

"Let's get outa here," Wade Lowenstein whispered hoarsely, his eyes popping, his face green with horror.

I picked up the paper and closed the book. The paper was perfectly blank. Nothing on it at all.

"Maybe," said Dinah, with a faint gulp, "maybe, Andrea, darling, you could persuade your ghost to write us a line on who did knock him off—"

"Hand me it, I'll try."

She had lots of nerve, this blue-eyed kid. She took the piece of paper and held it out in front of her and she said: "Creep, if you've got anything on your mind, get it off now. Here we are, here's the paper. Go ahead and write."

Almost instantly, her face looked terrified. Wade Lowenstein shouted: "What's wrong, kid? What's wrong?"

"Something — something is holding my wrists!" she cried sharply. "I—can't—stop—it!"

You could almost see the unseen hands upon her. They held the wrist of the hand that held the paper and they raised up her hand to the electric light, so that the paper was outlined before the burning bulb.

She shook as if she were struggling against an implacable force, and sweat stood out on her face.

"Look!" I whispered sharply. "Look at the paper!"

There was a miracle before our eyes. The shade of a dead man was writing a message to us. It was the most terrifying thing I've ever seen—watching a dead man's hand boldly pen a message. Lowenstein gasped in a shrillness that was penetrating: "It's his fist. It's Croak's writing—I'd know it anywhere—"

And the spectre wrote: *I was shot and killed by Wade Lowenstein as the price of silence . . .*

Lowenstein, breathing like a caged beast, reached up and snatched the paper from her hand. He was completely berserk. He held his pistol in his hand and backed toward the door. "So you know," he said hoarsely. "But you got no proof. This is the only proof, his fist and I'll burn it!"

"He'll write another," I said.

"Oh—Oh!" he groaned, his eyes ready to leave his head, "what am I gonna do?"

"Did you really kill him?"

"Yeah, I killed him," Lowenstein whispered. "I had to— He would have talked, he would have

tried to throw the rap to me. You've got to help me outa here. What can a guy do against a ghost? I thought it was the malarkey—but it's real—it's real."

"No," I said. "You were right the first time. It's the malarkey, but I guess it did what it was supposed to do. It gave three witnesses to a confession of murder."

Lowenstein sprang to the door like a cat and wheeled covering us with his pistol. He slid the door open and he said, "Three witnesses who aren't going to talk."

Then some one outside hit him over the head with a blackjack, and that was the end of that.

You'll have to admit they all did a very clever job of it, for they even had me believing in spooks for awhile, and you know what a cynic I am. Dinah seemed almost disappointed. After Wade Lowenstein had passed out, the whole haunted house seemed to disgorge detectives and policemen, among them an individual named William (Poppa to you and me) Hanley, a lieutenant in the homicide bureau, who laughed himself red in the face and said I'd picked up four gray hairs.

"Maybe so," I said. "But it was a good act."

"But he didn't believe in the ghost at the end," Dinah said. "I had an idea that he was getting on to it,and I was afraid he would give it away to Lowenstein."

"Well," I said, "I began to realize that I was sucked in when I found the tinfoil edging on the gardening book downstairs on the living room table. But even knowing it was a fake, the rest of it was done so well, I couldn't help being impressed. Too impressed."

"Yag," said Poppa Hanley, choking on a simple "Yeah." He got control of himself. "You don't know really how any of it was done."

"I'll make some guesses now," I said. "First of all, did you cops work out a deal with Andrea DuBoise to supposedly rent this place?"

"Sure," said Poppa Hanley, tugging at an ear lobe. "We'd been tailing Lowenstein ever since he knocked off Mitchell. We had to land the guy. It was a personal matter, because he did that killing right under the noses of two dicks who were supposed to be guarding Croak. That's why the D.A.'s office said we could go the limit in this setup. Andrea is a good-looking dame, and we knew that Lowenstein was carrying the torch for her, and she said she would play ball with us."

"She is a remarkable young lady," I said, "and a wonderful actress. That bit where the spook grabbed her wrists and forced her to raise the paper against the elec-

tric light was so good, it gave me chills."

"But you still don't know how we did the stuff."

"Oh, come, come," I replied. "I've taken courses in elementary physics and electricity, too, my boy. The depressions in the rug and the seat cushion were simple. You attached magnetic solenoids to the material to be depressed, and by closing a circuit, the solenoid would shoot down, pulling the nap of the rug with it. Right?"

"Right," said Dinah. Because Poppa looked nonplussed.

"As for turning the pages of the book, you had the cover lined with thin brass, thin as paper, and you had the edges of every page rimmed with a faint strip of tinfoil. The book was always placed between two metal poles —the bookends. These were really magnets. When you energized one or the other, it would pull the metal of the pages toward it, at various speeds according to the magnetism you've supplied."

"The boy," said Andrea with a smile, "is good. But how about Dinah's hairpins?"

"I have been with Dinah to the hairdressers where they use those powerful little Alnico magnets to take the hairpins out. They pass the magnet around the head, and every pin in the hair jumps right out into the magnet. It's marvelous. Did you have one planted inside the top of her chair?"

"Uh-huh," said Poppa. "Turned it on until the pins flew out toward the magnet and then we shut down to let them fall on the floor. Spooky, eh?"

"Not bad," I said. "And you opened the door with a simple lock solenoid, I suppose. How the devil you worked the creaking steps and the footsteps in the room, I don't know."

Poppa grinned. "The whole lab from which we worked the thing was under the staircase in the closet. Instead of someone stepping down on each step going upstairs, we had a man push up from underneath each one from bottom to top. Effect is the same. As for the footsteps in the room, we used radio sound effects on that, feeding into the room through a speaker under the bed. We did the sigh that way, too."

"And the message was in invisible ink, I suppose, which was brought out by the heat of the bulb when Andrea held the paper against the bulb. And you forged Croak Mitchell's handwriting."

"Right."

"You sure went to a hell of a lot of trouble."

"We got our man, Daffy, and that's what counts."

"Then why did you drag me in for? And Dinah?"

"Well, we had to get Dinah to get you. And we had to get

you because Lowenstein would never have believed the women, but when he saw an old egg like you believing in the ghost of Croak Mitchell, he helped sell himself a bill of goods. Besides, it was my idea that you might be a help in case he blew his top and started shooting.

It was sincere flattery from Poppa and I appreciated it, but I didn't like the twinkle in his eye, and as a matter of fact, both Andrea and Dinah were looking much too smug. They figured that I'd been scared green, and they weren't far wrong.

"The only thing I can't figure out," I said, "is how you worked that ectoplasm gag. The white smokey stuff in the bedroom. Why, you know, it even looked like Croak Mitchell, the blood on his chest and all, and he kept pointing."

They looked blank. Dinah swallowed. Poppa said, warily: "Ah, what are you referring to Daffy?"

"Up in the room," I said. "It was over by the bed, whitish smoke in a sort of tight cloud, looking like Croak's agonized face, and pointing a finger right at Lowenstein all the time." I glanced at Dinah. "Didn't you see it? How the devil did they do it?"

"Well," gulped Dinah again, "I've got to be getting."

"I'll stay the night with you if you don't mind," said Andrea DuBoise, her eyes wide.

"You — saw — that?" Poppa asked slowly.

"Yeah," I said. "How did you do it?"

After that I was the only one not in a hurry to get out of the place.

VERY PERSONAL

ASPIRING AUTHORS! Have you ever been sold? No? Then send us your MSS and you soon will be. Mugg's Lit. Agency, 4 Shady Lane, E.C.4.

FILING. Have you any system? If not, all about it in "Iron Bars Do Not a Prison Make" by Gus Gorringe. (Soho Art Publications Ltd.). Profusely illustrated. 18s 6d. All booksellers.

HOPPED IT? His Majesty's Inspector of Taxes (address supplied) would value information concerning whereabouts of Sidney Scarpa, author of last year's best-selling crime novel, *In the Toot.* (Over 200,000 copies sold in this country alone.) Last seen London Airport, April Fool's Day, 1956.

PLOTS! PLOTS! PLOTS! Apply: New Era Building Estate, Rickmansworth.

CRIME WRITER seeks "ghost." Blonde preferred. 38–22–36. Box 1234.

—John Bude in *The Crime Writer*, Spring, 1957.

mr. smith kicks the bucket

by . . . Fredric Brown

Suddenly there was a hissing noise and flame and smoke burst out as the tinderlike jewel cases caught fire.

MR. HENRY SMITH, dapper little agent and investigator for the Phalanx Insurance Company, smiled at the girl at the reception desk, took off his gold-rimmed pince-nez spectacles to look at her better, and then put them back on.

"I wish to see Mr. Thorwald, your program manager, please," he said.

The girl looked doubtful. "The Bucket of Gems program goes on the air in just a few minutes and Mr. Thorwald's in charge of it. I don't—"

"Yes," said Mr. Smith. "It is concerning that program that I wish to see him. Ah, you may take this in to him with my card."

The object which Mr. Smith took from his vest pocket made the receptionist blink. It was almost two inches in diameter, red, transparent, and many-faceted.

She gulped once and then went into Thorwald's office with the red object in one hand and Mr. Henry Smith's card in the other. She came out almost immediately. "Mr. Thorwald will see you."

The program manager looked

Fredric Brown is known for the colorful characters in his novels, the recent THE LENIENT BEAST *(Dutton), his famous* THE FABULOUS CLIPJOINT, *and others, but it is doubtful whether any of these ever handled a case with the neatness and efficiency of colorless little Henry Smith—or showed such results.*

Copyright, 1944, and reprinted by permission of Street & Smith Publications, Inc.

up at Mr. Smith with harassed eyes. "This looks like the Kent ruby."

"It does," admitted Mr. Smith. "Ah, I understand, Mr. Thorwald, that you are starting a series of programs sponsored by the Jewelers' Mutual Co-operative Association, each program to present, in dramatized form, the history of a famous jewel. The writer of the best essay on some topic concerned with gems will receive a prize known as a 'bucket of gems,' from which the program takes its name, the Bucket of Gems program. Ah, may I sit down?"

"Do sit down. Is this the Kent ruby?"

"Thank you," said Mr. Smith. He sat down. "I understand that, whenever possible, you plan to have, for the audience to see, the jewel whose history is being dramatized. Of course, the radio audience, as distinguished from the studio audience, cannot see it, but they will obtain vicarious satisfaction from knowing that it is present at the studio. Is that correct?"

"Yes, except that we're going to have the featured jewel at all programs. We'll feature only jewels we can get hold of, not the Kohinoor or the Cullinan. Ones we can borrow, like— Now, damn it, is this the Kent ruby?"

"Ah, no," Mr. Smith murmured. "You see, the Phalanx Insurance Company, my company, has insured the Kent ruby. For that reason I have been quite interested in it. You recall, at the World's Fair, the exhibition of paste reproductions of famous jewels? This was one of them, and because it became badly scratched, I was able to acquire it for practically nothing. A pity, of course, that it is damaged, but one must look closely to see the scratches."

Thorwald looked closely. "Yeah, I see them. Can't a real ruby be scratched?"

"Yes and no," Mr. Smith replied judiciously. "A diamond is ten on the scale of hardness, a ruby is nine. So one could scratch a ruby with a diamond. Now about your program, Mr. Thorwald. When precious stones are moved and handled, there is always danger of theft. I came to quote you on a policy that would cover your liability in case a theft occurred, either of the featured stones or of the stones in your award, the 'bucket of gems.' "

"We don't need insurance," said Mr. Thorwald. "With the guards and precautions we've arranged, the borrowed stones will be as safe as houses. And the 'bucket of gems' isn't worth . . . uh . . . isn't sufficiently valuable to justify— Well, look for yourself. There they are."

On a table at one side of the room was a neat array of fifteen

jewel cases, each containing a small jewel. Behind them stood a small bucket, about eight inches in diameter and five inches high, which would obviously be filled to overflowing with the jewel cases.

Mr. Smith walked over and looked down at them.

"Half-carat diamond?" he asked.

"Yes. Unflawed. Ruby and emerald are the same size. Good stones, but not extraordinary ones."

"And the others are larger, but less precious. An opal, a zircon, a garnet— But even so, there must be five hundred dollars' worth of gems here, at retail."

"At retail, yes," said Thorwald. "The Jewelers' Mutual doesn't buy them at retail."

"Of course," Mr. Smith murmured. "I grant it would be hardly worth while to write a policy on the 'bucket of gems' alone. But what would it cost you if the Kent ruby were stolen this evening?"

Thorwald grunted. "Why would it cost us anything? Didn't you say your company already had insured it? Mr. Carmichel couldn't collect from both of us."

"But you agreed, did you not, to be responsible for the full declared valuation of a hundred thousand dollars? Our policy is for thirty thousand. Mr. Carmichel could, and would, hold you legally liable for the difference. A matter of seventy thousand dollars."

The program director whistled softly. Then he sighed. "O.K., so we'd lose seventy thousand. And I'd lose my job. But, man, we've got four armed guards! Say, why'd you send in this hunk of paste with your card? Just to get my curiosity so I'd see you?"

Mr. Smith smiled gently. "I fear I must confess to some such motive, but in a good cause." He picked up the red stone from the desk and replaced it in his pocket.

"A very interesting stone, the Kent ruby," he said. "Too bad that it is very slightly flawed or it would be worth—well, any figure you might name. Because of that, and because it is not properly shaped, too thin for its diameter, we insured it for only thirty thousand. But when one considers its bloody history—"

The buzzer on Mr. Thorwald's interoffice communicator interrupted.

He flicked the switch.

"Mr. Carmichel is here, sir, and the four detectives."

"Send them in," Thorwald said. "And . . . uh . . . Mr. Smith, if you will be so kind as to leave now, I'll—"

"To leave? But, Mr. Thorwald, my company requested me to remain here until the program is over and Mr. Carmichel has been escorted home. We have a thirty-thousand-dollar interest, you see.

They delegated me to . . . ah . . . protect the jewel."

The program manager looked at the mild-mannered, dapper little man across the desk from him, and only good breeding kept him from snorting aloud.

Two private detectives came in first. Mr. Smith knew them both; Waters and Powell of the Argus Agency. Powell was a tall, gangling youngster not many years out of school; Waters was middle-aged, middle height, middle everything, so inconspicuous one had to look twice to see him. The best shadow cop in town, Mr. Smith knew.

Then came Mr. Carmichel, hanging tightly on to a brief case. Mr. Smith knew him only by sight, as a moderately wealthy confectioner whose money, made from bonbons, went into jewels for his collection.

After Carmichel came two men whom Mr. Smith recognized as police detectives and he nodded approvingly of Thorwald's choice of an escort. Krasnowicz and Lieutenant Brady were both good men. And the rivalry between the police and the private detectives from the Argus Agency would keep all of them on their toes.

Thorwald glanced at the clock on the wall. "Just in time, Mr. Carmichel. Twenty minutes to go. You . . . uh . . . brought the ruby?"

Carmichel took a jewel case from the brief case. He opened it and said, "The Kent ruby, Mr. Thorwald."

The program manager gazed reverently, and the others craned their necks for a glimpse before the box snapped shut. Thorwald said, "Thank you, Mr. Carmichel. We'll take good care of it." He put the case on his desk.

Brady had strolled over to the table that had the smaller gems on it. He said, "Nice stuff here," and held up the case containing the half-carat diamond. "This'd go nice in a ring."

Thorwald nodded. "Time to put those cases in the bucket. When you've looked at that one, Lieutenant, just close it and put it in."

He followed suit by walking over to the table and closing another of the jewel cases and putting it into the small bucket.

Carmichel, looking at the opal, said, "Nice stones, but pretty small, aren't they, Thorwald?"

"Of course, but, after all, we're giving them away. Darn few programs give prizes worth as much as this bucket. It's worth more than any prize given regularly on any other program."

Powell said, "Me, I think it's a swell prize. Got flash."

The bucket was full now, and Thorwald said, "We'd better go up to the studio. I'll take the bucket. You bring the ruby, Mr. Car—"

His hand was almost on the

handle of the bucket when it happened. A sudden hissing noise and then a flash of light that shone almost intolerably bright down within the bucket of gems, showing blindly between the edges of the cases.

Then flame and smoke as the tinder-like jewel cases caught fire.

It was Mr. Smith who moved first. He lifted his foot and knocked the bucket off the table onto the tile floor.

Jewel cases scattered. Some of them flaming, some smoldering a few that had been on top, untouched. Some of the cases came open, others stayed shut.

And out of the bucket, too, came a tiny cylindrical metal thing, still burning with dazzling brightness.

"Incendiary," Brady snapped. "Let it alone. Get the stones out of the cases, quick."

There was momentary bedlam that gradually straightened itself into order. Less than a minute later the incendiary had burned itself out and was a mere bit of white ash in the center of a very black spot on the tile floor.

Several of the jewel cases, kicked into a pile in one corner, still smoldered and smoked. But they were all empty. On the table where the bucket had stood lay all fifteen of the jewels. A few were dark and blackened, but most of them were unharmed.

Thorwald sighed and wiped his forehead with the handkerchief he had used to handle several burning cases, leaving a smear of black from temple to temple. "Thank heaven, we've got buckets in the safe upstairs ready for several programs ahead."

He bent over the jewels lying on the table. "Garnet's ruined, and the opal. That little black thing used to be a pearl. Others are all right, although some of them will have to be repolished. Not much loss."

"How much would you say?" Walters asked.

Thorwald shrugged. "Not more than a hundred dollars. Even counting the cases and replacing a few tiles in the floor."

Lieutenant Brady was bending over the ash where the incendiary had burned itself out. "Something like an incendiary pencil in miniature. It's only an inch or so long. But who put it in there?"

"One of us," said Mr. Smith.

Brady turned to stare at him. Mr. Smith nodded. "The bucket was empty five minutes ago. I picked it up and looked at and in it. As to which of us put it in— Well, we all had an opportunity. All of us were helping to close the jewel cases and to put them in the bucket."

Thorwald said impatiently, "I'm afraid this will have to wait. The program goes on in five minutes. I'll have to get an-

other bucket of gems from the safe, and then we'd better—"

"Just a minute," Mr. Smith broke in. "Before anyone leaves this room, wouldn't it be a good idea to check on the safety of the Kent ruby? Nothing was accomplished by that incendiary, unless possibly it was placed there to cause a distraction."

Thorwald stared for a long moment at Mr. Smith and then whirled and grabbed the black case containing the Kent ruby. He opened it.

It was empty.

Lieutenant Brady took two steps to the door and put his back against it. He took a deep breath and seemed to get taller, his voice assumed new authority.

"All right," he said. "Guess I'm in charge. And the ruby has to be in this room, so nobody's leaving. Thorwald, you use the telephone if you want to. Tell them to get that other bucket for the program, and that they'll have to put it on without the Kent ruby, unless we find it in time. How long we got?"

Thorwald looked dazed. "It was to be shown near the end of the program, after the dramatization of its history. We've got almost half an hour."

"We'll find it then," Brady said. "It's got to be in this room."

Brady waited until Thorwald had phoned. Then he said, "No use calling headquarters till we've got the ruby. Unless somebody objects to being searched without a warrant. In that case, we'll get a warrant. Anybody object?"

Nobody spoke up.

"And you won't object, Mr. Thorwald, to our searching the office?"

Thorwald's voice was grim. "Tear it to pieces if you want."

"It's in this room," Brady repeated. He said it emphatically, as an article of faith. "Krasnowicz can search me, then I'll search Krasnowicz. Then we'll go over the rest of you, one at a time. If it's on anybody, we'll find it. If we don't, we'll take the office apart. But we'll find it."

"I don't think you will," Mr. Smith put in quietly.

Brady glared at him. "If we don't, we'll all go over to headquarters, and there's an X-ray machine there."

Carmichel nodded approvingly. "I was going to suggest that. A stone that size would be dangerous, but not impossible, to swallow."

Waters asked, "Isn't a ruby transparent?"

"Not to X-ray," said Carmichel. "Even a diamond shows up."

"Yeah," confirmed Brady. "Well, now that we got the program laid out, anybody want to save us the trouble?"

There was a deep silence and then Mr. Smith coughed deprecatingly and reached into his vest

pocket. "I fear that I'd better account for my having this object, before you find it. It was not stolen from the case."

Brady grabbed for it, and his face turned almost as red as the object in his hand. He said: "Is this a gag? The hell that ain't the Kent ruby! Did you—"

Mr. Smith sighed. "I fear I shall have to call on Mr. Thorwald to corroborate my story. And to vouch for me on my possession of the imitation before the original came into this room. He examined it thoroughly before you gentlemen entered the office."

Thorwald nodded. "That's right. And he explained how he acquired it and—is that stone scratched?"

Brady looked closer. "Yeah a little."

Thorwald took the stone, glanced at it, and handed it back. "That's the same one. I can identify the marks on it."

"I would suggest," said Mr. Smith, "that you put it aside and proceed. Later, at any time, you can check with the Phalanx Insurance Company on my possession of—"

"All right, all right," Brady broke in impatiently. "Then this ain't it." He started to put it into his pocket, and then, apparently remembering he was to be searched first, put it on Thorwald's desk blotter.

Then he raised his arms slightly from his sides and said, "O.K., Krasnowicz. Go ahead."

Krasnowicz stepped forward.

Mr. Smith took off his gold-rimmed pince-nez and breathed gently first on one lens and then on the other.

"Really," he said, "this is quite unnecessary. I mean, the Kent ruby is not concealed upon the person of anyone in this room."

"Yeah?" said Brady. He didn't lower his arms.

"Yes," repeated Mr. Smith, "and I might further say that it will be equally unnecessary to search the room. It is not concealed anywhere in the office."

He smiled gently. "In fact," he added, "Mr. Carmichel did not bring the ruby here this evening at all."

"Yeah?" said Brady. Then he lowered his arms and said, "Huh?"

"Yes," said Mr. Smith. "Much as I regret to expose Mr. Carmichel's duplicity, he did not bring the ruby here tonight because he no longer had the ruby. Some time recently—I don't know just when—Mr. Carmichel's house was broken into, and the ruby stolen."

"Huh?"

"Exactly," said Mr. Smith. "Mr. Carmichel did not, I regret to say, report the loss either to the police or to us."

Brady looked at Carmichel and then back at Mr. Smith.

"What reason could he have for not reporting it?"

"We had insured the ruby," Mr. Smith went on patiently, "for the sum of thirty thousand dollars. Had Mr. Carmichel reported it lost, he would have received just that. But he already had arranged to lend his ruby for tonight's radio program. Now do you understand?"

"No," said Brady. "I think you're nuts."

Mr. Smith sighed. "The studio had agreed to be responsible for the gem while it was here, and at its full value, declared by Mr. Carmichel, of a hundred thousand dollars. If it were stolen, or appeared to be stolen, here tonight he could recover seventy thousand dollars from the studio besides the thirty thousand from us. A net gain of seventy thousand dollars."

"You mean," said Brady, "he brought a phony tonight instead of the real ruby? And he put the little incendiary in the bucket to distract attention while he took it out of the case?"

"Exactly," said Mr. Smith.

"But what the hell? The imitation he brought—we all saw there was something in the case—will have to be on him or hidden in the room here. He couldn't have got it out of the room, and it would give away the play if we found it."

"Quite true," said Mr. Smith. "He would certainly have anticipated a search, however. And I think I can make a sufficiently accurate guess as to how he disposed of the imitation ruby that was in the case."

"How?"

"In moving picture comedies," said Mr. Smith, "you have undoubtedly seen people break glasses and bottles over one another's heads, not to mention dishes and other articles?"

"Sure."

"Those articles do not injure because they are made of spun sugar, instead of glass. An imitation ruby could be made of colored spun sugar and if enough care were used in its making it would stand superficial examination. Mr. Carmichel just gave us a quick glimpse when he opened and closed the case. It would probably have stood even a slightly closer examination; Mr. Carmichel is a confectioner, you know."

"But—"

"Exactly," Mr. Smith murmured. "I suggest that while the excitement over the burning bucket of gems was at its height, Mr. Carmichel took the imitation ruby from the case."

"And—"

"And *ate* it," Mr. Smith finished. "The sugar would digest, of course, and leave no traces for the X-ray. But, if I am right, proof can be found by making a microscopic examination of the lining inside the case. Surely

minute traces of colored sugar would remain on the nap of the silk. A substance which certainly could have no other logical reason for being there."

Brady said, "I'll be a—" And turned to look at Carmichel. "Well, Mr. Carmichel, is he right? I mean, when we examine the case, will we find what he says?"

The confectioner met his stare for a few seconds, and then nodded slowly. "He wins. But I don't see how he guessed."

Mr. Smith sighed. "I had to guess, Mr. Carmichel, only at the method. You see, I already knew that the stone had been stolen from you. So I knew you couldn't bring it here tonight. The burglar who took the stone came to the Phalanx Company, knowing from the newspapers that we'd insured it, to try to make a deal with us. But we do not make deals with criminals. We turned him down, and one of our detectives managed to tail him to his room when he left."

"The hell!" said Brady. "They get him?"

"I regret to say, no. He left his room almost immediately, before our operative could arrange to have him arrested there, and a few blocks off he discovered he was being followed. He ducked our man in a subway station. But our detective returned to the man's room, found the jewel, and reported in with it. The police have been notified and are now watching the room for his return."

Thorwald glanced at the clock, and groaned. "Then I suppose we've got to go through the program without the Kent ruby. Your office is miles from here and there won't be time to send for it. The stone would have to be upstairs in ten minutes."

"I fear there would not be time," admitted Mr. Smith. "But about that policy, Mr. Thorwald. Do you now see the advisability of complete protection?"

"Damn it, yes. Have your office write one up."

"Excellent," said Mr. Smith. "But I anticipated that after what might happen here this evening, you would be ready to sign with us. I have the policy application right here."

He put a paper on Thorwald's desk.

"But you will not wish to sign it without reading it, of course, and there is hardly time for that if you wish to take the Kent ruby up to the studio for the end of the dramatization. Mr. Brady, if you will be so kind as to take that red stone from the desk and rub it briskly with your handkerchief, the scratches will come off. They are . . . ah . . . external, applied with a jeweler's marking pencil."

Thorwald's eyes bulged. "You mean that that's really the—"

"Exactly," murmured Mr. Smith.

THE saint's RATINGS

To buy or not to buy?

Seems to be a question that faces the reader of new paperbacks. Too often he has been induced to buy the book because of the publisher's blurb on the cover, only to find he wishes he had spent the money on a short beer or a happiness pill. So to help you with your budget, here is what your reviewer thinks you'll get for your money this month.

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

Three haloes: Outstanding

Two haloes: Above average

One halo: Passable reading

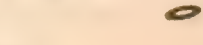
A pitchfork: For the ashcan

THE OUT IS DEATH, by Peter Rabe (Gold Medal, 25¢)

Another Daniel Port story written in Mr. Rabe's usual quiet and workmanlike manner. A modicum of blood and violence and a reasonable plot well paced and entertaining (although it may remind some readers a little too much of his previous "Dig My Grave Deep") makes this better reading than most.

THE CON MAN, by Ed McBain (Perma Books, 25¢)

Old McBain fans will be faithful but disappointed. Neophytes will meet the 87th Precinct for the first time and with it Detective Steve Carella and Teddy, his lovely deaf and dumb wife who we feel should, as in the past, remain just that and in the home. Neither Steve, Teddy nor the 87th Precinct are at their best.

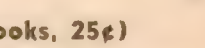


THE GIRL IN THE FRAME, by William Fuller (Dell Books, 25¢)

Mr. Fuller obviously knows his Florida and certain types of Florida law enforcement officers. So does Philip Wylie, one of our better authors, but there the resemblance ends. The mysterious disappearance of Palm Beach's Judge Chillingsworth seems to have inspired this plot. Sorry to say it didn't overly inspire this reviewer.

A TASTE OF BRASS, by Robert Donald Locke (Dell Books, 25¢)

Pete Brass may be ugly both in looks and temper, but he is irresistible to the gals. As a private eye he spends most of his time in a horizontal position either because of the people who like him or those who don't. At the end of the story his head is bloody but unbowed. Wish we could say the same for ours.



THE MURDER OF ANN AVERY, by Henry Kuttner (Perma Books, 25¢)

Slow-moving potpourri of juvenile delinquents, narcotics, psychoanalysis, and murder. Guaranteed to keep no one awake.

PURE SWEET HELL, by Malcolm Douglas (Gold Medal, 25¢)

We couldn't be more in agreement.

the headless mummies

by . . . Sax Rohmer

Who was beheading these mummies? Was this the act of a madman, or was there a stranger explanation?

THE mysteries which my eccentric friend, Moris Klaw, was most successful in handling undoubtedly were those which had their origin in kinks of the human brain or in the mysterious history of some relic of ancient times.

I have seen his theory of the Cycle of Crime proved triumphantly time and time again; I have known him successfully to demonstrate how the history of a valuable gem or curio automatically repeats itself, subject, it would seem, to that obscure law of chance into which he had made particular inquiry. Then his peculiar power—assiduously cultivated by a course of obscure study—of recovering from the atmosphere, the ether, call it what you will, the thought-forms—the ideas thrown out by the scheming mind of the criminal he sought for—enabled him to succeed where any ordinary investigator must inevitably have failed.

"They destroy," he would say in his odd, rumbling voice, "the clumsy tools of their crime; they hide away the knife, the bludgeon; they sop up the blood, they

While Sax Rohmer is better known as the creator of Fu Manchu and later contributions to the folklore of our times, he also wrote a group of stories, some of which we have already brought you, about the exploits of that strange man known as Moris Klaw who could sense the smell of death.

From: THE DREAM DETECTIVE, by Sax Rohmer.
Copyright, 1925, by Doubleday, Page & Co.; Copyright, 1953, by Sax Rohmer.

throw it, the jimmy, the dead man, the suffocated poor infant, into the ditch, the pool—and they leave intact the odic negative, the photograph of their sin, the thought thing in the air!" He would tap his high yellow brow significantly. "Here upon this sensitive plate I reproduce it, the hanging evidence! The headless child is buried in the garden, but the thought of the beheader is left to lie about. I pick it up. Poof! He swings—that child-slayer! I triumph. He is a dead man. What an art is the art of the odic photograph."

But I propose to relate here an instance of Moris Klaw's amazing knowledge in matters of archaeology—of the history of relics. In his singular emporium at Wapping, where dwelt the white rats, the singing canary, the cursing parrot, and the other stock-in-trade of this supposed dealer in oddities, was furthermore a library probably unique. It contained obscure works on criminology; it contained catalogues of every relic known to European collectors with elaborate histories of the same. What else it contained I am unable to say, for the dazzling Isis Klaw was a jealous librarian.

You who have followed these records will have made the acquaintance of Coram, the curator of the Menzies Museum, and it was through Coram that I first came to hear of the inexplicable beheading of mummies, which, commencing with that of Mr. Pettigrew's valuable mummy of the priestess Hor-ankhu, developed into a perfect epidemic. No more useless outrage could well be imagined than the decapitation of an ancient Egyptian corpse; and if I was surprised when I heard of the first case, my surprise became stark amazement when yet other mummies began mysteriously to lose their heads. But I will deal with the first instance, now, as it was brought under my notice by Coram.

He rang me up early one morning.

"I say, Searles," he said; "a very odd thing has happened. You've heard me speak of Pettigrew the collector; he lives out Wandsworth way; he's one of our trustees. Well, some demented burglar broke into his house last night, took nothing, but cut off the head of a valuable mummy!"

"Good heavens!" I cried. "What an original idea!"

"Highly so," agreed Coram. "The police are hopelessly mystified, and as I know you are keen on this class of copy I thought you might like to run down and have a chat with Pettigrew. Shall I tell him you are coming?"

"By all means," I said, and made an arrangement forthwith.

Accordingly, about eleven o'clock, I presented myself at a gloomy Georgian house standing

well back from the high road and screened by an unkempt shrubbery. Mr. Mark Pettigrew, a familiar figure at Sotheby auctions, was a little shrivelled man, clean-shaven, and with the complexion of a dried apricot. His big spectacles seemed to occupy a great proportion of his face, but his eyes twinkled merrily and his humor was as dry as his appearance.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Searles," he said. "You've had some experience of the *outré,* I believe and, where two constables, an imposing inspector, and a plainclothes gentleman who looked like a horse have merely upset my domestic arrangements, you may be able to make some intelligent suggestion."

He conducted me to a large gloomy room in which relics, principally Egyptian, were arranged and ticketed with museum-like precision. Before a wooden sarcophagus containing the swathed figure of a mummy he stopped, pointing. He looked as though he had come out of a sarcophagus himself.

"Hor-ankhu," he said, "a priestess of Sekhet; a very fine specimen, Mr. Searles. I was present when it was found. See —here is her head!"

Stooping, he picked up the head of the mummy. Very cleanly and scientifically it had been unwrapped and severed from the trunk. It smelt strongly of bitumen, and the shrivelled features reminded me of nothing so much as Mr. Mark Pettigrew.

"Did you ever hear of a more senseless thing?" he asked. "Come over and look at the window where he got in."

We crossed the dark apartment, and the collector drew my attention to a round hole which had been drilled in the glass of one of the French windows opening on a kind of miniature prairie which once had been a lawn.

"I am having shutters fitted," he went on. "It is so easy to cut a hole in the glass and open the catch of these windows."

"Very easy," I agreed. "Was anyone disturbed?"

"No one," he replied, excitedly; "that's the insane part of the thing. The burglar, with all the night before him and with cases containing portable and really priceless objects about him, contented himself with decapitating the priestess. What on earth did he want her head for? Whatever he wanted it for, why the devil didn't he *take* it?"

We stared at each other blankly.

"I fear," said Pettigrew, "I have been guilty of injustice to my horsey visitor, the centaur. You look as stupid as the worst of us!"

"I feel stupid," I said.

"You are!" Pettigrew assured me with cheerful impertinence. "So am I, so are the police; but

the biggest fool of the lot is the fool who came here last night and cut off the head of my mummy."

That, then, is all which I have occasion to relate regarding the first of these mysterious outrages. I was quite unable to propound any theory covering the facts, to Pettigrew's evident annoyance; he assured me that I was very stupid, and insisted upon opening a magnum of champagne. I then returned to my rooms, and since reflection upon the subject promised to be unprofitable, had dismissed it from my mind, when some time during the evening Inspector Grimsby rang me up from the Yard.

"Hullo, Mr. Searles," he said. "I hear you called on Mr. Pettigrew this morning?"

I replied in the affirmative.

"Did anything strike you?"

"No; were you on the case?"

"I wasn't on the case then, but I'm on it now."

"How's that?"

"Well, there's been another mummy beheaded in Sotheby's auction rooms!"

I knew quite well what was expected of me.

"Where are you speaking from?" I asked.

"The auction rooms."

"I will meet you there in an hour," I said, "and bring Moris Klaw if I can find him."

"Good," replied Grimsby, with much satisfaction in his voice; "this case ought to be right in his line."

I chartered a taxi and proceeded without delay to the insalubrious neighborhood of Wapping Old Stairs. At the head of the blind alley which harbors the Klaw emporium I directed the man to wait. The gloom was feebly dispelled by a wavering gaslight in the shedlike front of the shop. River noises were about me. Somewhere a drunken man was singing. An old lady who looked like a pantomime dame was critically examining a mahogany chair with only half a back, which formed one of the exhibits displayed before the establishment.

A dilapidated person whose nose chronically blushed for the excesses of its owner hovered about the prospective purchaser. This was William, whose exact position in the Klaw establishment I had never learned, but who apparently acted during his intervals of sobriety as a salesman.

"Good evening," I said cheerfully. "Is Mr. Moris Klaw at home?"

"He is, sir," husked the derelict; "but he's very busy, sir, I believe, sir."

"Tell him Mr. Searles has called."

"Yes, sir," said William; and, turning to the dame: "Was you thinking of buyin' that chair,

mum, after you've quite done muckin' it about?"

He retired into the cavernous depths of the shop, and I followed him as far as the dimly seen counter.

"Moris Klaw, Moris Klaw! The devil's come for you!"

Thus the invisible parrot hailed my entrance. Indescribable smells, zoo-like, with the fusty odor of old books and the unclassifiable perfume of half-rotten furniture, assailed my nostrils; and mingling with it was the distinct scent of reptile life. Scufflings and scratchings sounded continuously about me, punctuated with squeals. Then came the rumbling voice of Moris Klaw.

"Ah, Mr. Searles—good evening, Mr. Searles! It is the Pettigrew mummy, is it not?"

He advanced through the shadows, his massive figure arrayed for traveling, in the caped coat, his toneless beard untidy as ever, his pince-nez glittering, his high bald brow yellow as that of a Chinaman.

"There has been a second outrage," I said, "at Sotheby's."

"So?" said Moris Klaw, with interest; "another mummy is executed!"

"Yes, Inspector Grimsby has asked us to join him there."

Moris Klaw stooped and from beneath the counter took out his flat-topped brown bowler. From its lining he extracted a cylindrical scent spray and mingled with the less pleasing perfumes that of verbena.

"A cooling Roman custom, Mr. Searles," he rumbled, "so refreshing when one lives with rats. So it is Mr. Grimsby who is puzzled again? It is Mr. Grimsby who needs the poor old fool to hold the lantern for him, so that he, the clever Grimsby, can pick up the credit out of the darkness! And why not, Mr. Searles, and why not? It is his business; it is my pleasure."

He raised his voice. "Isis! Isis!"

Out into the light of the gluttering gas lamp, out from that nightmare abode, stepped Isis Klaw—looking more grotesque than a French fashion plate in an ironmonger's catalogue. She wore a costume of lettuce green silk, absolutely plain and unrelieved by any ornament which rendered it the more remarkable. It was cut low at the neck, and at the point of the V, suspended upon a thin gold chain, hung a big emerald. Her darkly beautiful face was one to inspire a painter seeking a model for the Queen of Sheba, but an ultra-modern note was struck by a hat of some black, gauzy material which loudly proclaimed its Paris origin. She greeted me with her wonderful smile.

"What, then," I said. "Were you about to go out?"

"When I hear who it is," rum-

bled Moris Klaw, "I know that we are about to go out; and behold we are ready!"

He placed the quaint bowler on his head and passed through to the front of the shop.

"William," he admonished the ripe-nosed salesman, "there is here a smell of fourpenny ale. It will be your ruin, William. You will close at half-past nine, and be sure you do not let the cat in the cupboard with the white mice. See that the goat does not get at the Dutch bulbs. They will kill him, that goat—those bulbs; he has for them a passion."

The three of us entered the waiting cab; and within half an hour we arrived at the famous auction rooms. The doors were closed and barred, but a constable who was on duty there evidently had orders to admit us.

The thing we had come to see lay upon the table with an electric lamp burning directly over it. The effect was indescribably weird. All about in the shadows fantastic "lots" seemed to leer at us. A famous private collection was to be sold in the morning and a rank of mummies lined one wall, whilst, from another, stony Pharaohs, gods and goddesses scorned us through the gloom. We were a living group in a place of long-dead things. And yellow on the table beneath the white light, with partially unwrapped coils of discolored linen hanging gruesomely from it, lay a headless mummy!

I heard the spurt of Moris Klaw's scent spray behind me, and a faint breath of verbena stole to my nostrils.

"Pah!" came the rumbling voice; "this air is full of deadness!"

"Good evening, Mr. Klaw," said Grimsby, appearing from somewhere out of the gloom. "I am so glad you have come." He bowed to Isis. "How do you do, Miss Klaw?"

The bright green figure moved forward into the pool of light. I think I had never seen a more singular picture than that of Isis Klaw bending over the decapitated mummy. Indeed, the whole scene would have delighted Rembrandt.

"I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Klaw," said a middle-aged gentleman, stepping up to the curio dealer; "the Inspector has been telling me about you."

Moris Klaw bowed, and his daughter turned to him with a little nod of the head.

"It is the same period," she said, "as Mr. Pettigrew's mummy. Possibly this was a priest of the same temple. Certainly both are of the same dynasty."

"It is instructive," rumbled Moris Klaw, "but so confusing."

"It's amazing, Mr. Klaw," said Grimsby. "If I understand Miss Klaw rightly, this is the mummy of someone who lived at the same

period as the priestess whose mummy is in Mr. Pettigrew's possession?"

"I do not trouble to look," rumbled Moris Klaw, who, in fact, was staring all about the room. "If Isis has said so, it is so."

"If I happened to be superstitious," said Grimsby, "I should think this was a sort of curse being fulfilled, or some fantastic thing of that sort."

"You should call a curse fantastic, eh, my friend?" said Moris Klaw. "Yet here in your own country you have seen a whole family that was cursed to be wiped out mysteriously. Am I with you?"

Grimsby looked very perplexed.

"There's nothing very mysterious about how the thing was done," he said. "Some madman got in here with a knife early in the evening. It's always pretty dark, even during the daytime. But the mystery is his object."

"His object is a mystery, yes," agreed Klaw. "I would sleep here in order to procure a mental negative of what he hoped or what he feared, this lunatic headsman, only that I know he is a man possessed."

"Possessed!" I cried; and even Isis looked surprised.

"I said possessed," continued Klaw, impressively. "He is some madman with one idea. His mad brain will have charged the ether"—he waved his long arms right and left—"with mad thoughts. The room of Mr. Pettigrew also will be filled with these grotesque thought-forms. Certainly he is insane, this butcher of mummies. In this case, I shall rely, not upon the odic photography, not upon that great science the Cycle of Crime, but upon my library."

None of us, I am sure, entirely understood his meaning; and following a brief silence, during which, in a curiously muffled way, the sounds of the traffic in Wellington Street came to us as we stood there around that modern bier with its 4000-year-old-burden, Grimsby asked, with hesitancy:

"Don't you want to make any investigations, Mr. Klaw?"

Then Moris Klaw startled us all.

"I have a thought!" he cried, loudly. "Name of a dog! I have a thought!"

Grabbing his brown bowler, which he had laid on the table beside the headless mummy, "Come, Isis!" he cried, and grasped the girl by the arm. "I have yet another thought, most disturbing! Mr. Searles, would you be so good as also to come?"

Wondering greatly whence we were bound and upon what errand, I hastened down the room after them, leaving Inspector Grimsby staring blankly. I think he was rather disappointed

with the result of Moris Klaw's inquiry—if inquiry this hasty visit may be termed. He was disappointed, too, at having spent so short a time in the company of the charming Isis.

The middle-aged gentleman came running to let us out.

"Good-night, Inspector Grimsby!" called Moris Klaw.

"Good-night! good-night, Miss Klaw!"

"Good-night, Mr. Someone who has not been introduced!" said Klaw.

"My name is Welby," smiled the other.

"Good-night, Mr. Welby!" said Moris Klaw.

During the whole of the journey back to Wapping, Moris Klaw regaled me with anecdotes of travels in the Yucatan Peninsula. I had never met a man before who had ventured fully to explore those deadly swamps; but Moris Klaw chatted about the Izamal temples as unconcernedly as another man might chat about the Paris boulevards. Isis took no part in the conversation, from which I gathered that, although she seemed to accompany her father everywhere, she had not accompanied him into the jungles of Yucatan.

"In the heart of those forests, Mr. Searles," he whispered, "are stranger things than these headless mummies. Do you know that the secret of those great temples buried in the swamps and the jungles and guarded only by serpents and slimy, crawling things, is a door which science has yet to unlock? What people built them, and what god was worshipped in them? Suppose"—he bent to my ear—"I hold the key to that riddle; am I assured to be immortal? Yes? No?"

His conversation, although it often seemed to be studiously eccentric, was always that of a man of powerful and unusual mind, a man of vast and unique experience. I was rather sorry when we arrived at our destination.

As the cab drew up at the head of the court, I saw that the shop of Moris Klaw was in darkness; but again telling the man to wait, we walked down past the warehouse, beyond whose bulk tided muddy Thames, and my eccentric companion producing a key from one of the bulging pockets of his caped coat inserted it into the lock of a door which looked less like a door than a section of a dilapidated hoarding.

The door swung open.

"Ah!" he hissed. "It was not locked!"

Klaw struck a match and peered into the odorous darkness.

"William!" he rumbled. "William!"

But there was no reply. Isis suddenly laid her hand upon my arm, and it occurred to me that

for once, her wonderful composure was shaken.

"Something has happened!" she whispered.

Her father lighted a gas-burner, and the yellow light flared up, reclaiming from the gloom furniture, pictures, cages, glass cases, statuettes, heaps of cheap jewelery and false teeth, books, and a hundred-and-one other items of that weird stock-in-trade.

Then, under the littered counter we found William lying flat on his back with his arms spread widely.

"Ah, *cochon!*" muttered Klaw, "beer-swilling pig!"

He stooped to raise the head of the prostrate man, and then to my surprise dropped upon his knees besides him, stooped yet lower, and sniffed suspiciously. Again Isis Klaw seized my arm, and her dark eyes were opened very wide as she leaned forward watching her father. He stood up, holding a glass in his hand which yet contained some drops of what was apparently beer. At this, too, he sniffed. He walked over to the gaslight and examined the fluid closely, whilst Isis and I watched him, together. Finally Moris Klaw inserted a long white forefinger into the dirty glass and applied the tip to his tongue.

"Opium!" he said. "Many drops of pure opium were put in this beer."

He turned to me with a curious expression upon his parchment-colored face.

"Mr. Searles," he said, "my second idea was a good idea. I shall now surprise you."

He led the way through that neat and business-like untidy shop. Although within the shop and in front of it only gaslight was used, in the office he switched on an electric lamp. But we did not delay long in Moris Klaw's sanctum, lined with its hundreds of books, its obscure works of criminology, its records of strange things: we proceeded through another door and up a thickly carpeted stair.

I had never before penetrated thus far into the habitable portion of Moris Klaw's establishment; the book-lined office hitherto had marked the limit of my explorations. But now, as more electric lights were switched on, I saw that we stood upon a wide landing panelled in massive black oak. Armored figures stood sentinel-like against the walls, and several magnificent specimens of Chinese porcelain met my gaze. I might have thought myself in some old English baronial hall. Next we entered a big, rectangular room, which I wholly despair of describing. Apparently it was used as a study, a library, a laboratory, and a warehouse for all sorts of things, from marble Buddhas to innumerable pairs of boots. Also, there was

in it a French stove; and upon a Persian coffee table stood a frying pan containing a cooked sausage solidified in its own fat. There was clear evidence, moreover, in the form of a rolled-up hammock, that the place served as a bedroom.

Altogether there were four mummies in the apartment. One of these, partly unwrapped lay amongst the litter on the floor—headless!

"Mon dieu!" cried Isis, clasping her hands; "it is uncanny, this!"

She was evidently excited, for her French accent suddenly asserted itself to a marked degree. Moris Klaw, from somewhere amongst the rubbish at his feet, picked up the severed head of the mummy and stared at it intently. In the stillness I could hear the river noises very distinctly, and a sort of subterranean lapping and creaking which suggested that at high tide the cellars of the establishment became flooded. Moris Klaw dropped the head from his hands. It fell with a dull thud to the floor.

From the lining of his hat he took out the inevitable scent spray and moistened his brow with verbena.

"I need the cool brain, Mr. Searles," he said. "I the old cunning, the fox, the wily, am threatened with defeat. This slaughter of mummies it surpasses my experience. I am nonplussed; I am a stupid old fool. Let me think!"

Isis was looking about her in a startled way.

"It is horribly uncanny, Miss Klaw," I said. But the drugging of the man downstairs points to very human agency. Perhaps if we could revive him—"

"He will not revive," interrupted Moris Klaw, "for twelve hours at least. In his beer was enough opium to render unconscious the rhinoceros!"

"Is there anything missing?" I asked.

"Nothing," rumbled Klaw. "He came for the mummy. Isis, will you prepare for us those cooling drinks that help the fevered mind, and from downstairs bring me the seventh volume of the 'Books of the Temples.' "

Isis Klaw immediately walked forward to the door.

"And Isis, my child," added her father, "remove the tall cage to the top end of the shop. Presently that William's snores will awake the Borneo squirrel."

As the girl departed, Klaw opened an inner door and ushered me into a dainty white room, an amazing apartment indeed, a true Parisian boudoir. The air was heavy with the scent of roses, for bowls of white and pink roses were everywhere. Klaw lighted a silver table lamp with a unique silver gauze shade apparently lined with pale rose-colored silk.

Evidently this apartment belonged to Isis, and was as appropriate for her, exquisite Parisian that she seemed to be, as the weird barn through which we had come was an appropriate abode for her father.

When presently Isis returned I saw her for the first time in her proper setting, a dainty green figure in a white frame. Moris Klaw opened the bulky leather-bound volume which she had handed to him, and whilst I sat sipping my wine and watching him, he busily turned over the pages (apparently French MS.) in quest of the reference he sought.

"Ah!" he cried, in sudden triumph; "vaguely I had it in my memory, but here it is, the clue. I will translate for you, Mr. Searles, what is written here: 'The Book of the Lamps,' which was revealed to the priest, Pankhaur, and by him revealed only to the Queen '—it was the ancient Egyptian Queen, Hatshepsu. Mr. Searles—' was kept locked in the secret place beneath the alter, and each high priest of the temple, all of whom were of the family of Pankhaur, held the key and alone might consult the magic writing. In the 14th dynasty, Seteb was high priest, and was the last of the family of Pankhaur. At his death the newly appointed priest, receiving the key of the secret place, complained to Pharaoh that the Book of the Lamps was missing.' "

He closed the volume and placed it on a little table beside him.

"Isis," he rumbled, looking across at his daughter, "does the mystery become clear to you? Am I not an old fool? Mr. Searles, there is only one other copy of the work"—he laid a long white hand upon the book—"known to European collectors. Do I know where that copy is? Yes? I think so!"

There was triumph in his hoarse voice. Personally I was quite unable to see in what way the history of the "Book of the Lamps" bore upon the case of the headless mummies; but Moris Klaw evidently considered that it afforded a clue.

He stood up.

"Isis," he said, "bring me my catalogue of the mummies of the Bubastite priests."

That imperious beauty departed in meek obedience.

"Mr. Searles," said Moris Klaw, "this will be for Inspector Grimsby another triumph; but without these records of a poor old fool, who shall say if the one that beheads mummies had ever been detected? I neglected to secure the odic negative because I thought I had to deal with a madman; but I was more stupid than an owl. This decapitating of mummies is no madman's work, but is done with a purpose, my

friend—with a wonderful purpose."

The Menzies Museum (scene of my first meeting with Moris Klaw) was not yet opened to the public when Coram (the curator), Moris Klaw, Grimsby, and I stood in the Egyptian Room before a case containing mummies. The room adjoining, the Greek Room, had been the scene of the dreadful tragedies which first had acquainted me with the wonderful methods of the eccentric investigator.

"Whoever broke into Sotheby's last night, Mr. Klaw," said Grimsby, "knew the ins and outs of the place; knew it backward. It's my idea that he was known to the people there. After having cut off the head of the mummy he probably walked out openly. Then, again, it must have been somebody who knew the habits of Mr. Pettigrew's household that got at *his* mummy. Of course," his eyes twinkled with a satisfaction which he could not conceal, "I'm very sorry to hear that our man has proved too clever for *you!* Think of a burglar breaking into Mr. Moris Klaw's house!"

"Think of it, my friend," rumbled the other, "if it makes you laugh go on thinking of it, and you will grow fat!

Grimsby openly winked at me. He was out of his depth himself, and was not displeased to find the omniscient Moris Klaw apparently in a similar position.

"I am not resentful, continued Klaw, "and I will capture for you the mummy man."

"What?" cried Grimsby. "Are you on the track?"

"I will tell you something my laughing friend. You will secretly watch this Egyptian Room like the cat at the mouse-hole, and presently—I expect it will be at night—he will come here, this hunter of mummies!"

Grimsby stared incredulously.

"I don't doubt your word, Mr. Klaw," he said; "but I don't see how you can possibly know that. Why should he go for the mummies here rather than for those in one of the other museums or in private collections?"

"Why do you order a bottle of Bass," rasped Klaw, "in a saloon, rather than a bottle of water or a bottle of vinegar? It is because what you want is a bottle of Bass. Am I a damn fool? There are others. I am not alone in my foolishness!"

The group broke up: Grimsby, very puzzled, going off to make arrangements to have the Egyptian Room watched night and day, and Coram, Klaw, and I walking along in the direction of the Greek Room.

"I have no occasion to remind you, Mr. Klaw," said Coram, "that the Menzies Museum is a hard nut for any burglar to crack. We have a night watchman, you

will remember, who hourly patrols every apartment. For anyone to break into the Egyptian Room, force one of the cases and take out a mummy, would be a task extremely difficult to perform undetected."

"This mummy hunter," replied Klaw, "can perform it with ease; but because we shall all be waiting for him he cannot perform it undetected."

"I shouldn't think there is much likelihood of any attempt during the day?" I said.

"There is no likelihood," agreed Klaw; "but I like to see that Grimsby busy! The man with the knife to decapitate mummies will come tonight. Without fear he will come, for how is he to know that an old fool from Wapping anticipates his arrival?"

We quitted the Museum together. The affair brought back to my mind the gruesome business of the Greek Room murders, and for the second time in my life I made arrangements to watch in the Menzies Museum at night.

On several occasions during the day I found myself thinking of this most singular affair and wondering in what way "The Book of the Lamps," mentioned by Moris Klaw, could be associated with it. I was quite unable to surmise, too, how Klaw had divined that the Menzies Museum would become the scene of the next outrage.

We had arranged to dine with Coram in his apartments, which adjoined the Museum buildings, and an oddly mixed party we were, comprising Coram, his daughter, Moris Klaw, Isis Klaw, Grimsby, and of course, myself.

A man had gone on duty in the Egyptian Room directly the doors were closed to the public, and we had secretly arranged to watch the place from nightfall onward. The construction of the room greatly facilitated our plan; for there was a long glass skylight in the center of its room, and by having the blinds drawn back we could look down into the room from a landing window of a higher floor—a portion of the curator's house.

Dinner over, Isis Klaw departed.

"You will not remain, Isis," said her father. "It is so unnecessary. Good-night, my child!"

Accordingly, the deferential and very admiring Grimsby descended with Coram to see Isis off in a taxi. I marvelled to think of her returning to that tumbledown, water-logged ruin in Wapping.

"Now, Mr. Grimsby," said Moris Klaw, when we four investigators had gathered together again, "you will hide in the case with the mummies!"

"But I may find myself helpless! How do we know that any particular case is going to be

opened? Besides, I don't know what to expect."

"Blessed is he that expecteth little, my friend. It is quite possible that no attempt will be made tonight. In that event you will have to be locked in again tomorrow night!"

Grimsby accordingly set out. He held a key to the curator's private door, which opened upon the Greek Room, and also the key of the wall case. Moris Klaw had especially warned him against making the slightest noise. In fact, he had us all agog with curiosity and expectation. As he and Coram and I, having opened, very carefully, the landing window, looked down through the skylight into the Egyptian Room, Grimsby appeared beneath us. He was carrying an electric pocket torch.

Opening the wall case nearest to the lower end of the room, he glanced up rapidly, then stepped within, reclosing the glass door. As Klaw had pointed out earlier in the evening, an ideal hiding place existed between the side of the last sarcophagus and the angle of the wall.

"I hope he has refastened the catch," said our eccentric companion, "but not with noisiness."

"Why do you fear his making a noise?" asked Coram curiously.

"Outside, upon the landing," replied Moris Klaw, "is a tall piece of a bas-relief; it leans back against the wall. You know it?"

"Certainly."

"Tonight, you did not look behind it, in the triangular space so formed.

"There's no occasion. A man could not get in there."

"He could not, you say? No? That exploits to me, Mr. Coram, that you have no eye for capacity! But if you are wrong, what then?"

"Anyone hiding there would have to remain in hiding until the morning. He could not gain access to any of the rooms; all are locked, and he could not go downstairs, because of the night attendant in the hallway."

"No? Yes? You are two times wrong! First—someone is concealed there!"

"Mr. Klaw!" began Coram, excitedly.

"Ssh!" Moris Klaw raised his hand. "No excitement. It is noisy and a tax upon the nerves. Second—you are wrong, because presently that hidden one will come into the Egyptian Room!"

"How? How in heaven's name is he going to *get* in?"

"We shall see."

Utterly mystified, Coram and I stared at Moris Klaw, for we stood one on either side of him; but he merely wagged his finger enjoining us to silence, and silent perforce we became.

The view was a cramped one, and standing there looking out

at the clear summer night, I for one grew very weary of the business. But I was sustained by the anticipation that the mystery of the headless mummies was about to come to a climax. I felt very sorry for poor Grimsby, cramped in the corner of the Egyptian Room for I knew him to be even more hopelessly in the dark respecting the purpose of these maneuvers than I was myself. In vain I racked my brain in quest of the link which united the ancient "Book of the Lamps" with the singular case which had brought us there that night.

Coram began to fidget, and I knew intuitively that he was about to speak.

"Ssh!" whispered Moris Klaw.

A beam of light shone out beneath us, across the Egyptian Room!

I concluded that something had attracted the attention of Grimsby. I leaned forward in tense expectancy, and Coram was keenly excited.

The beam of light moved; it shone upon the door of the very case in the corner of which Grimsby was hiding, but upon the nearer end, fully upon the face of a mummy.

A small figure was dimly discernible, now, the figure of the man who carried the light. Cautiously he crossed the room. Evidently he held the key of the wall case, for in an instant he had swung the door back and was hauling the mummy onto the floor.

Then out upon the midnight visitor leapt Grimsby. The light was extinguished—and Moris Klaw, drawing back from the window, seized Coram by the arm, crying, "The key of the door!"

We were down and into the Egyptian Room in less than half a minute. Coram switched on all the lights; and there with his back to the open door of the wall case, handcuffed and wild-eyed, was—Mr. Mark Pettigrew!

Coram's face was a study for the famous archaeologist whom we now saw manacled before us was a trustee of the Menzies Museum!

"Mr. Pettigrew!" he said, hoarsely. "Mr. Pettigrew! There must be some mistake—"

"There is no mistake, my good sir," rumbled Moris Klaw. "Look, he has with him a sharp knife to cut off the head of the priest."

It was true. An open knife lay upon the floor beside the fallen mummy!

Grimsby was breathing very heavily and looking in rather a startled way at his captive who seemed unable to realize what had happened. Coram cleared his throat nervously. It was one of the strangest scenes in which I had ever participated.

"Mr. Pettigrew," he began, "it is incomprehensible to me—"

"I will make you to comprehend," interrupted Moris Klaw. "You ask," he raised a long finger, "why should Mr. Pettigrew cut off the head of his own mummy? I answer for the same reason that he cut off the head of the one at Sotheby's! I answer for the same reason that he cut off the head of the one at my house, and for the same reason that he came to cut off the head of this one! What is he looking for? He is looking for the 'Book of the Lamps'!" He paused, gazing around upon us. Probably, excepting the prisoner, I alone amongst his listeners understood what he meant.

"I have related to Mr. Searles," he continued, "some of the history of that book. It contained the ritual of the ancient Egyptian ceremonial magic. It was priceless; it gave its possessors a power of kings! And when the line of Pankhaur became extinct it vanished. Where did it go? According to a very rare record—of which there are only two copies in existence—one of them in my possession and one in Mr. Pettigrew's! *it was hidden in the skull of the mummy of a priest or priestess of the temple!*"

Pettigrew was staring at him like a man fascinated.

"Mr. Pettigrew had only recently acquired that valuable manuscript work in which the fact is recorded; and being an enthusiast, gentlemen—he spread wide his hands continentally—"all we poor collectors are enthusiasts—he set to work upon the first available mummy of a priest of that temple. It was his own. The skull did not contain the priceless papyrus! But all these mummies are historic; there are only five in Europe."

"Five?" blurted Pettigrew.

"Five," replied Klaw; "you thought there were only four, eh? But as a blind you called in the police and showed them how your mummy had been mutilated. It was good. It was clever. No one suspected you of the outrages after that—no one but the old fool who knew that you had secured the second copy of that valuable work of guidance!

"So you did not hesitate to use the keys you had procured in your capacity as trustee to gain access to this fourth mummy here." He turned to Grimsby and Coram. "Gentlemen," he said, "there will be no prosecution. The fever of research is a disease; never a crime."

"I agree," said Coram, "most certainly there must be no prosecution; no scandal. Mr. Pettigrew, I am very, very sorry for this."

Grimsby, with a rather wry face, removed the handcuffs. A singular expression proclaimed itself upon Pettigrew's shrivelled countenance.

"The thing I'm most sorry for," he said, dryly, but with the

true fever of research burning in his eyes, "if you will excuse me for saying it, Coram, for I'm very deeply indebted to you—is that I can't cut off the head of this fourth mummy!"

Mr. Mark Pettigrew was a singularly purposeful and rudely truculent man.

"It would be useless," rumbled Moris Klaw. "I found the fifth mummy in Egypt two years ago! And behold"—he swept his hand picturesquely through the air—"I beheaded him!"

"What!" screamed Pettigrew, and leapt upon Klaw with blazing eyes.

"Ah," rumbled Klaw, massive and unruffled, "that is the question—*what?* And I shall not tell you!"

From his pocket he took out the scent spray and squirted verbena into the face of Mr. Pettigrew.

HAVE YOU A COMPLETE FILE OF THE Saint?

HERE is your opportunity to purchase back issues of THE SAINT. But—the first issue, we're sorry to say, is all sold out. A few copies are still available of all others and they are yours by filling in the coupon below. THE SAINT is always star-studded by the best writers in the field. We are now offering these at BARGAIN PRICES—single copies at 35¢; three copies at $1; six copies at $1.75; and twelve copies at $3.25. When ordering, circle the issues desired.

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
320 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, N. Y.

Kindly send me the copies of THE SAINT whose issues I have circled below. One copy at 35¢, three copies at $1, six copies at $1.75, twelve copies at $3.25. I enclose $_____ in full payment—no additional charge for postage.

JAN. '54; MAY '54; JULY '54; SEPT. '54; OCT. '54; NOV. '54; DEC. '54; JAN. '55; FEB. '55; MAR. '55; APR. '55; MAY '55; JUNE '55; JULY '55; AUG. '55; SEPT. '55; OCT. '55; NOV. '55; DEC. '55; JAN. '56; FEB. '56; MAR. '56; APR. '56; MAY '56; JUNE '56; JULY '56; SEPT. '56; OCT. '56; NOV. '56; JAN. '57; FEB. '57; MAR. '57; APR. '57; MAY '57; JUNE '57; JULY '57; AUG. 57.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY, ZONE, STATE_____

PLEASE PRINT SD 79

morbid egotist

by . . . Jonas Carter

At last! He hid in the alley behind Blaine's house, drawn revolver in his hand, waiting until the man would come out.

THE crowd had begun to gather hours before the execution. Thousands were milling around in the neighboring streets, drinking lemonade and waiting for the moment when President Garfield's assassin was to die.

Charles Julius Guiteau, self-described patriot and Christian, former attorney and former evangelist, had always known that he would make his contribution to history one day. As a young man, working in the fields and workshops of the Oneida Community, he had tacked up signs in his room like this—"*Charles J. Guiteau, Premier of England, will deliver a lecture in St. James' Hall, London,*"—but he had found enough of an outlet in the community's religious program, in the debating society and in the library, to keep him at the cooperative until April of 1865, the month Lincoln was assassinated, when he set out for New York, "the Bible for my textbook and the Holy Ghost for my schoolmaster."

Living on dried beef, crackers and lemonade in a room in Ho-

What makes an assassin tick? What compulsion, or combination of circumstances makes an often ordinary—or ineffectual—man turn to murder as a solution? Jonas Carter, New York freelance writer, explores the background here of Guiteau, the strange man who shot President Garfield in 1881.

boken, Guiteau began planning a chain of theocratic dailies, to be published "under the power and magnetism of God," that would blanket the country. "I claim inspiration," he wrote. "I am in the employ of *Jesus Christ & Co.*, the very ablest and strongest firm in the universe. What I can do is limited only by their power and purpose."

But New York was not ready. Convinced that, "in the world the flesh everywhere prevails over the spirit," Guiteau fled back to the cooperative for still another year, returning to New York in the winter of 1866, determined now to make his peace—and his mark—in the sinful world around him. Perhaps the stern apostles of what a later day would describe as "bible communism," at Oneida, had come to a decision about this young man who now attempted to find work with Horace Greeley on the *Tribune*, attended services at the Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, then pastored by the Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, and spent much of his time in reading. Soon he moved to a cheaper room in Harlem, where, as he wrote home, you had "the benefit of the city and the country combined—the pure fresh air, the beautiful trees and the green grass of the country united with a cheap and easy access to the center of the metropolis." You could ride to the Astor House on horsecar, a distance of eight miles, for six cents. Saving was important when you were searching for work.

But work—hard work—had never appealed too much to the young man, and it was about this time that he discovered a talent for avoiding it. The world owed him a living, as he was later to tell his wife, and somehow—someway—he intended to see that this happened. The well-dressed young attorney (he had decided law had greater possibilities) appeared to be so refined and trustworthy that people were happy to lend him money and tailors to extend him credit, until the day when they attempted to find him. Guiteau developed a taste for pleasant living in those days, and for comfortable lodgings which he'd inevitably leave as soon as his bill got too high.

Horace Greeley campaigned for the Presidency on the Democratic and Liberal Republican tickets in 1872, and Guiteau rallied to his support, occasionally speaking at street meetings and hanging around campaign headquarters. Greeley's death, shortly after his defeat in the election, was a blow to Guiteau. His wife divorced him in 1873—she'd had enough. The New York *Herald* ran an exposé of his professional methods in 1874 and he even landed in jail for a few weeks. It was obviously time for the young attorney to leave the city,

so he moved to Chicago, took desk space for a while in another attorney's office, and described himself as an Attorney and former American Consul in Marseilles.

Chicago proved barren ground for his talents, however, which may have been why he returned to evangelism.

Guiteau traveled thousands of miles back and forth across the country, during the years 1877 to 1880, often destitute but apparently happier than he had been for years as he spoke to usually empty halls, publishing his lectures as pamphlets (naturally not paying the printers) and ducking boarding-house keepers with much of his old talent. Sometimes he would have neither overcoat nor gloves, a mark of destitution in the seventies. When the train conductors would ask him for his fare he would tell them, calmly, "I am traveling for the Lord. I have no money."

By the spring of 1880, his audiences and the sale of pamphlets and books had dwindled to a new low. Politics, with the possibility of employment by the victor, seemed to offer the only hope. A General Garfield had been nominated on the 36th ballot, and Guiteau returned to New York in the summer of 1880, prepared to offer his services to the Republicans.

He probably never realized that then, as later in Washington, he was regarded as a nuisance. The man, who had looked at himself in the mirror, years earlier, and had asked his wife if she didn't think he looked like a Foreign Minister, was convinced that his services to the cause merited reward. General Garfield received him, after the inauguration in '81, listened politely to his request to be appointed Consul in Paris, and referred the request to the State Department who promptly pigeonholed the matter. Time and time he'd write to the President, citing his services, occasional speeches and writings. "There is nothing against me! I claim to be a gentleman and a Christian!" Day after day, week after week, he'd haunt the corridors, his cuffs a little more frayed each time, his shoes scuffed, until the day he ran into Secretary Blaine who shouted, "Never speak to me again about the Paris consulship as long as you live!"

At just this time the Republican Party was torn by dissension. Guiteau, "greatly depressed in mind and spirit from the political situation," as he later put it, and already unhappy about the ingratitude of the men whom he felt he'd helped to elect, began to wonder how the situation could be solved. Maybe things would be better if the President was out of the way. It was a shocking idea—at first—and he prayed for guidance.

He wrote to the President urging that Garfield demand Blaine's immediate resignation, "otherwise you and the Republican party will come to grief." By June 1st, a week later, when the President had still not answered, Guiteau had no more doubt as to the divinity of the inspiration.

On June 6th he went into John O'Meara's gunshop at 15th and F Street. O'Meara had a large revolver there, a .44 caliber British bulldog with a white bone handle which he knew would look good in a museum. He borrowed the money from a cousin and went back to the shop a few days later, buying the revolver and cartridges. O'Meara had to show him how to load it.

And now began the long wait.

He'd sit for hours on a bench in Lafayette Square, opposite the White House, waiting for the President to come out. That Sunday, June 12th, he followed the President to church. "I could not think of a more sacred place for removing him than while he was at his devotions." But there was no opportunity to fire at him without injuring others.

Some days later, on June 16th, the President was to go down to Long Branch in New Jersey with Mrs. Garfield, who had been ill. Guiteau made up his mind to shoot the President as he was boarding the train, but Mrs. Garfield looked so thin, he said later, "and she clung so tenderly to the President's arm, that I did not have the heart to fire on him." The President returned to Washington the following Monday. Guiteau was waiting at the station but decided not to shoot him then. It was too hot and sultry.

Friday evening at seven o'clock, July 1st, he was sitting on his usual bench in Lafayette Square when he saw the President walk out of the White House grounds. Guiteau followed, yards behind, until Garfield entered Blaine's house. If the President came out alone he would shoot him then and there, but Garfield reappeared in a few moments, arm in arm with Blaine, laughing and chatting as they walked back to the White House, "as hilarious as two young school girls" as Guiteau commented later, in disgust. He followed them all the way back to the White House but did not shoot. It was a hot and sultry evening, and he was tired. The President was to leave for a brief vacation the next morning at nine-thirty, Saturday, July 2nd, 1881. That might be the time to do it!

He got up at five o'clock that Saturday morning. He took a stroll and then went to sit on his usual bench in Lafayette Park, reading the morning paper, the picture of a relaxed man. About seven o'clock he went back to where he was living, had a leisurely breakfast, wrote some

letters, placed his revolver in his right hip pocket, took along a small package, and turned his back on his last hotel bill.

He went back to Lafayette Square and sat there quietly until just before nine o'clock when he took a horsecar to the railroad station. Once there, he had his shoes shined. He now had twenty cents left. He went over to a newsstand and asked the man there to take care of his package which contained his writings and statements to the press. Then he went into the men's room, checked his revolver, and began the final wait.

The President and Blaine came in. Guiteau, dressed in a clean white shirt, a black coat, black trousers and a broad brimmed black felt hat, was standing near one of the benches in the waiting room as they passed. He waited until they'd gotten almost across the room. Then he drew his revolver, walked up to a few feet from the President, and shot him in the back.

Garfield was to linger until the night of September 19th.

Guiteau had come there "in the capacity of an agent of the Deity," he stormed at the court as the trial opened that November. A neurologist described him as a morbid egotist. The Government described him as a disappointed office seeker with a morbid craving for notoriety. The jury declared him sane—and guilty.

He was hanged on June 30th, 1882.

He brushed his hair and had his shoes shined before he was led from his cell. Once on the scaffold, his voice trembling with emotion, he read this poem that he had written that morning.

I am going to the Lordy;
I am so glad.
I am going to the Lordy;
I am so glad.
I am going to the Lordy,
Glory Hallelujah!
Glory Hallelujah!
I am going to the Lordy!
I love the Lordy with all my soul;
Glory Hallelujah!
And that is the reason I am going to the Lord.
Glory Hallelujah! Glory Hallelujah!
I am going to the Lord.

I saved my party and my land;
Glory Hallelujah!
But they have murdered me for it
And that is the reason
I am going to the Lordy.
Glory Hallelujah! Glory Hallelujah!
I am going to the Lordy.

Moments later, Charles Julius Guiteau, swindler and assassin, was dead.

first job

by . . . Charles E. Fritch

He should have smashed it over his head and then used the broken bottle to carve up his face—but he didn't.

SCHOOL was out, summer vacation had started, and we had nothing to do.

"How about a movie?" Joey suggested.

"Got no money," I told him. "The old man's been boozing it up again. He gets real nasty when he's on a drunk, and he doesn't shell out except for beer and wine and whiskey."

Joey considered this. "Angie," he said, after awhile. "Why don't you line yourself up a job?"

"A job?"

"Sure. How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"You're old enough. I can fix it up if you want. A service station job, maybe. How's that?"

"I don't know," I said. "I hadn't thought about it."

"Well, think about it, boy. You're growing up. You got responsibilities. You can't depend on the old man any more for spending money. About time you struck out for yourself."

"I've never worked on a job before," I told him.

"It's easy," Joey insisted. "Nobody's born an expert on anything. You gotta learn. How

Have you ever asked yourself what exactly "makes" a juvenile delinquent? What is the driving force that makes a youngster strike out at society? Charles Fritch here joins those who wonder whether the cause isn't often deeper than the urge to emulate anti-social heroes.

about it? Want me to set it up for you?"

"Okay," I said.

"I better see about it now," Joey said. "Might want you to start right in. No use wasting time. Check with you later."

I nodded and watched him go down the street. This was real nice of Joey, I thought. But then he was like that. A real square guy, always doing something for a pal. Like now—running an unemployment office, just for me.

I grinned at that. Already I was beginning to feel good. I was broke, and having to ask the old man for dough was like pulling teeth without novocaine. Now I didn't have to do it. Now, maybe if I saved up some money I could get away, get a room by myself before the old man killed me one of these drunken nights.

I went home, thinking about it. Ma was in the kitchen, ironing, when I walked in. She had her housecoat folded around her as though she was ashamed of being six months pregnant and was trying to hide it. I wondered how she'd managed to keep the baby through all the beatings the old man gave her.

"You're home early," she said. No pleasure at seeing me. Just a statement.

"Nothing much to do," I said, dropping into a chair. I put one leg up over the chair arm and toyed with the frayed covering. "Joey's going to get me a job," I said, after awhile.

"Oh?" she said wearily. She straightened as though about to say something, then decided not to and went back to ironing.

"Something for spending money," I said. "Maybe—maybe I can give you a little out of it."

She didn't say anything. I punched the chair arm, frowning. I wondered if she was thinking about Joey. She used to tell me he was no good, that he ran around with a gang that did terrible things, like stealing from stores and molesting girls.

Well, heck, the stores expect it. That's why they hire store detectives. It's like a game to see what you can get away with. I've done it myself, so I don't see what some people make a big thing out of it for. And as for the girls, you can bet *they* expect it, too. They're not kids. They'd be insulted if you didn't make a pass at them. Sure, they've got to pretend they don't want it 'cause that's part of the game, but they do just the same, even if maybe some of them don't even realize it themselves. And as for the other fellows in the Club, well, she couldn't talk to me about that, either. I knew most of the guys in it, and Joey'd promised I'd be in before long.

She began to annoy me, so I got up. "I'm going out," I said.

"You just came in," she said.

"I know," I said.

I went out through the door and down the stairs. She didn't say anything more. I wished she had. I don't know why I wished it, but I did. I knew, though, that she didn't care if I stayed or left. Maybe way down deep inside she did, like she used to. But she wouldn't say anything. It'd stayed buried down there where the old man had pounded it and never come back up.

I met Joey in the middle of the block.

"It's all set," he said, grinning. "You free tonight?"

I nodded.

"Good. You can start your new career then. They said it might be rough on you because you haven't got any experience, but they're willing to try you out anyway."

"You're a pal, Joey."

"Nothin' to it. Say look, Angie, how about me treating you to a movie. Then you can treat me when you get paid off. Okay?"

"Okay," I said.

We went over to the CAMEO, where they showed three pictures all night long and we could get in for thirty-five cents. They had an Edward G. Robinson picture with a lot of shooting in it and a John Wayne western with a lot of shooting in it, too. The other picture was about some rich guy trying to make out with a girl from the farm; it wasn't too good, except maybe funny in a couple spots.

When we got out, the sun was just going down on the other side of the city, and the lights along Main Street were glaring.

Joey looked at his watch. "Got a couple hours yet. Why don't we go over to the Clubhouse; you're practically a member now."

"I'd like to go home first."

"Your old man'll be there."

"I know," I said. "I don't want to see him, but—" I shrugged, not knowing how to say it. "Well, I feel sorry for Ma there alone with him. I—I like to think maybe he isn't so hard on her when I'm around."

"Well," Joey said doubtfully, "okay. But meet me on the corner of Furnace and First in an hour. We'll go over from there."

"Okay," I said.

"An hour from now," Joey called. "No later."

"I'll be there," I promised.

I ran home. I was out of wind by the time I'd gotten there and climbed those stairs. The old man was in the kitchen. He was sitting at the table drinking a bottle of beer. Ma wasn't in sight, but the bedroom door was closed. I'd have to go past him to get to it.

"Well," he said, looking at me like I was a worm or something. "Where the hell have you been?"

"I—I went to a movie," I said.

"Oh, you went to a movie, did you?" he said in a nasty voice. He jerked a finger toward the bedroom. "Did *she* give you the

money?" I got too close to him, and he reached out and grabbed me by the collar. "Tell me, you little brat, did your loving mother give you the money she's holding out on me so you could spend it on some lousy movie!"

"Leggo, you're hurting me!"

He pushed me away, disgusted. I tried to edge around him toward the bedroom.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"I thought—"

"You thought you'd go in and see if you could get some more money out of your lying mother, do you?"

I shrugged helplessly. "I only—"

"Don't think I don't know you two have been conniving against me all the time. You two with your heads together. I'd like to *bash* your heads together." He got up, unsteadily. "Maybe I will. You've been getting a little too sassy for your own good."

I backed away, fists clenching. "Stay away from me," I warned.

"Or what?" he wondered.

He grinned and made a grab for me. I stepped back, but not fast enough. His fingers curled into my shirt and pulled me toward him.

"I didn't do anything," I said. "I didn't do anything!"

He hit me with the palm of his hand. My cheek stung so it felt numb.

"Got to teach you respect for your father," he said, raising his hand again.

I squirmed loose and made it to the door. Swearing, he followed me, tripped on a chair leg, and fell on his face on the floor.

I should have picked up that beer bottle on the table and smashed it over his head and then used the broken bottle to carve up his face. That's what I felt like doing, and that's what I should have done; it'd serve him right. But I didn't. Instead, I beat it out the door and down the stairs, and out into the clean air.

I turned and shook my fist at the house. My cheek still stung, but I was too busy being mad to think about it. I'd show him. I'd never go back there. Not ever. I couldn't stand it. I'd go nuts. Maybe I could stay at the Clubhouse. Maybe get a hotel room. Something. Anything. I hoped the baby would never be born; I hoped she'd lose it. A fine life it'd be for the kid. A fine life!

I hurried down the street. The hour wasn't up, but I knew I'd find Joey at the Clubhouse with the gang. We could all start out from there, the way they wanted it. I'm pretty sure I hadn't shown it, but I'd been a little nervous about this service station job. Not now, though. Now, it would be a pleasure.

I only hoped the attendant put up a fight when we robbed him. I wanted to rough up somebody else for a change.

Yes! YOU GET $17.30 WORTH OF EXCITING MYSTERIES AT ONCE *Free*

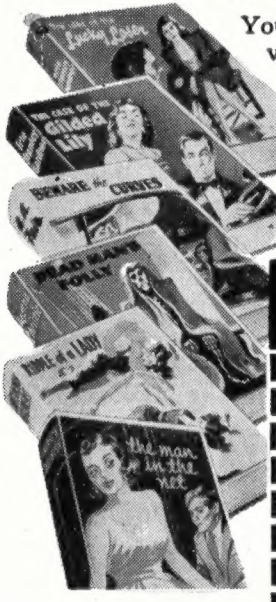
— *Continued from Back Cover*

WOULDN'T YOU LIKE to get the *cream* of the best NEW mysteries — for much less than $1 each?

Out of the 300 or more new mysteries that come out every year, the Detective Book Club selects the very "cream of the crop"—by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Manning Coles, . Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many *other* famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsomely-bound volume (a $7.50 to $8.50 value) for only $2.29.

Take ONLY The Books You Want



You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview," which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. YOU need NOT take any specific number of books — only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time.

Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save TWO-THIRDS the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean — delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Postcard for Six FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once -- FREE — the six complete mystery thrillers, described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books. But this offer may be withdrawn soon. To avoid disappointment, mail the postcard *at once* to:

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE **SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD**

54

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

•

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

Walter J. Black, President PW
DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB
Roslyn, L. I., New York

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX full-length mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel my membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $2.29 plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. (*Books shipped in U.S.A. only.*)

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address.....

City..... Zone No. (if any)..... State.....

Giant Gift Package of New Smash-Hit Mysteries!

FREE ALL 6

TO NEW MEMBERS

TOP-DRAWER MYSTERIES

by the World's Greatest Mystery Writers

Including 3 of the latest hits by

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

Plus Thrillers by ★ AGATHA CHRISTIE ★ ANTHONY GILBERT ★ PATRICK QUENTIN

All Full-Size, Full-Length Books. A $17.30 Value!

1 THE CASE OF THE Lucky Loser
By Erle Stanley Gardner

Perry Mason has only one chance to prove his client is innocent of murder—through a corpse that has been buried for TWO YEARS!

2 THE CASE OF THE Gilded Lily
By Erle Stanley Gardner

When Stewart Bedford wakes up in a motel room after being drugged, he finds he's been sleeping next to a corpse. He KNOWS he'll be accused of the murder. Will Mason find the real killer?

3 Beware the Curves
By A. A. Fair
(Pen Name used by Erle Stanley Gardner)

Accused "murderer" Ansel begs detective Lam to find the missing cab driver who drove the *real* killer to the murder spot. Lam finds the cabbie — but he identifies ANSEL as the killer!

4 Dead Man's Folly
By Agatha Christie

HERCULE POIROT is invited to a society murder hunt. The hostess has arranged all the clues for a "murder," including a "victim." But the girl who IS supposed to play dead isn't playing — she's murdered!

5 Riddle of a Lady
By Anthony Gilbert

DETECTIVE CROOK knows THREE men entered Stella Foster's apartment, separately, on the night Stella was murdered. He doesn't know *why* the third man disappeared—*who* the first and second are—and *which* is the killer!

6 The Man in the Net
By Patrick Quentin

Everybody believes you killed your wife. Even *you* can't understand why she wrote that incriminating "farewell note"—and told the Constable you were trying to kill her. Your only chance is to *find the real killer!*

—SEE OTHER SIDE

FIRST CLASS
PERMIT No. 47
(Sec. 34.9, P.L.&R.)
Roslyn, N.Y.

BUSINESS REPLY CARD

No Postage Stamp Necessary if Mailed in the United States

4¢ POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY

DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB

ROSLYN, L. I.

NEW YORK